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**Horizon**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART**

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**THE STRATEGIC RETREAT OF THE LEFT**

*by* JOHN S. SPINK

**LIBYAN DIARY—I**

*by* CECIL BEATON

**ALFRED WALLIS**

(i) *by* SVEN BERLIN

(ii) *by* BEN NICHOLSON

**PLANNED TYRANNY**

*by* L. T. C. ROLT

**FRAGMENT OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY—IX**

*by* AUGUSTUS JOHN

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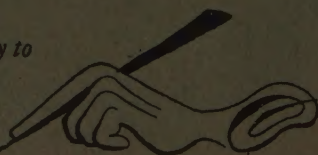
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# COMMENT

As the war goes on intimations of the kind of world that will come into being after the war become clearer. It will be a world in which the part played by the British will be of supreme importance. In fact one might say that the whole of British history, tradition and character will be judged in the future by how they rise to the occasion of the post-war years. England will find itself in the position of one of those fairy-tale princes who drift into a tournament, defeat a dragon or a wicked knight and then are obliged to marry the king's daughter and take on the cares of a confused, impoverished, and reactionary kingdom. That kingdom is Europe, the new dark continent which must perish if it cannot attain peace and unity and which is yet in constant eruption of war, economic rivalry, and race-hatred.

Britain is the weakest of the three great post-war powers unless it has behind it a strong, united Europe it must be overwhelmed by America, either involuntarily or in a tug-of-war with a communist Europe and Russia. If England fails to unite Western Europe it fails as a world power, if it succeeds and can hold a balance between American capitalism and Soviet communism, defending Western Europe from the reactionary imperialism of one and the oppressive bureaucracy of the other it will prove itself the greatest and wisest middleman in History. To achieve this, England must resurrect that political wisdom for which it was once famous and produce a scheme for Europe which will incorporate the socialist idealism of Russia with the humanist individualism of America and which will make toward the gradual atrophy of European race-hatreds and nationalist pretensions. The onus is on England because it cannot count on American help if the Republicans win the next election, and choose to consider Europe as a market to be kept in order nor can it survive except by making use of its dual position as being both in Europe and outside it.

To achieve and deserve this leadership will require courage and wisdom, with an appreciation of the complexity of European affairs and a sense of trusteeship for the European spirit which we are still far from possessing. But Europe is more than a political concept, it is still the chief breeding-ground of ideas.



the laboratory, the studio and the reference library of the world's art, science, and imagination. If England is to lead Europe, it must assume the cultural as well as the moral and political leadership of Europe, it must restore liberty of expression, economic security and mental audacity to the world of art and ideas.

This is a most difficult task, because England—the only country in Europe where a man may still paint or write very much what he likes, and find a market for it—is nevertheless a philistine country. Worse still, the philistinism is an essential factor in the national genius, and forms part of the stolid, practical, tolerant, pleasure-loving responsibility-taking British character. There is no other civilization in the world so old, so mellow, so wise and so polite which can yet get along so happily without respect for learning, love of art or intellectual curiosity. The French are saturated in these things; the Americans worship culture even though they are inclined to do so for the wrong reasons; the English, to whom will fall the task of restoring paper and ink and paints and canvases to occupied Europe, dissipate their aesthetic instinct in ball-games, card-games, dart-boards and football pools. Even the culture of England in wartime is a most haphazard affair. Just how much art would we have had without Sir Kenneth Clark? How much new poetry without three publishers, T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read and John Lehman?

A visit to the French Exhibition at the National Gallery (the best picture show since the war started) brings the problem closer. Why is not English painting better? Why do we raise Sargent instead of Renoir, Munnings instead of Degas, pre-Raphaelites instead of Impressionists? The climate of the Ile de France is hardly different from that of Southern England: many of the scenes chosen by the Impressionists are not in themselves beautiful; their gardens are inferior to English gardens; their tall, red-roofed villas almost as ugly as ours; their magical light is not peculiar to the Seine valley. What have they got that we lack?

Can the question be answered sociologically? The art of the Impressionists and their followers is the supreme flowering of bourgeois society. Most of the Impressionist painters were well-to-do people; they were not only secure in their patrons, they were secure in their investments; all through their lives (except Van Gogh) they never had to worry about money. This is not all-important, but it is a great addition to a sense of vocation.

They were also secure in their aesthetic philosophy. They believed in devoting a long life to the worship of beauty and the observance of nature. Politics, society, family were not represented, but they were not the important things. There was a certain Chinese humanism about them, they loved their friends and painted them admirably in their favourite surroundings, they enjoyed, in moderation, the good and simple things of life, they were not ashamed of man's place in nature, nor of urban civilization with its alcoves and café-tables, nor of old age with its arm-chairs and bookshelves. If the highest expression of their art is such a landscape as the Renoir of Argenteuil, a vision of watery paradise, or the Seurat of a wood or the Pissarro of La Roche-Guiyon, there are two smaller pictures which perhaps betray more of their secret. One is a tiny Manet of a dark bistro-interior, which reveals all the poetry of city-life; the other is Vuillard's portrait of Tristan Bernard in his garden. The garden is hideous—grass with a flinty rosebed against the brick of a Normandy villa, and the bearded poet is rocking back in it on a cane chair. The effect is of a civilization as sure of itself as a poem of Li-Po or Po-chüi. One sees immediately that the English could not paint like that because Kipling or Meredith or Henry James would not rock about so irreverently—because the English imperialist bourgeoisie, though just as stable as the French, had that extra moral and mercenary conscience, had too much money, too much sense of duty, and so could never give off such a light and heavenly distillation as Impressionism. Whistler and Sickert succeeded because they were not English and at the price of a Harlequin defence-mechanism which never left them.

When we restore the arts then to Europe, we can do one of two things: we can attempt to restore to bourgeois civilization sufficient order and stability to enable the cream of art to come to the top, or we can develop a civilization which will permit a new art to arise. If we adopt the second course instead of trying to put back the nineteenth-century Humpty-Dumpty on the wall, then we must first change radically our attitude to art here: we must give art a place in our conception of the meaning of life and the artist a place in our conception of the meaning of the State which they have never known before. Never again must our artists be warped by opposition, stunted by neglect or etiolated by official conformity.



LOUIS MACNEICE

## EPITAPH FOR LIBERAL POETS

If in the latter  
End—which is fairly soon—our way of life goes west  
And some shall say *So What* and some *What Matter*,  
Ready under new names to exploit or be exploited,  
What, though better unsaid, would we have history say  
Of us who walked in our sleep and died on our Quest?

We who always had, but never admitted, a master,  
Who were expected—and paid—to be ourselves,  
Conditioned to think freely, how can we  
Patch up our broken hearts and modes of thought in plaster  
And glorify in chromium-plated stories  
Those who shall supersede us and cannot need us—  
The tight-lipped technocratic Conquistadores?

The Individual has died before; Catullus  
Went down young, gave place to those who were born old  
And more adaptable and were not even jealous  
Of his wild life and lyrics. Though our songs  
Were not so warm as his, our fate is no less cold.

Such silence then before us, pinned against the wall,  
Why need we whine? There is no way out, the birds  
Will tell us nothing more; we shall vanish first,  
Yet leave behind us certain frozen words  
Which some day, though not certainly, may melt  
And, for a moment or two, accentuate a thirst.

## ALCOHOL

On golden seas of drink, so the Greek poet said,  
Rich and poor are alike. Looking around in war  
We watch the many who have returned to the dead  
Ordering ~~time-and-again~~ the same-as-before:

## HORIZON

Those Haves who cannot bear making a choice,  
 Those Have-nots who are bored with having nothing to choose,  
 Call for their drinks in the same tone of voice,  
 Find a factitious popular front in booze.

Another drink: Bacchylides was right  
 And self-deception golden—Serve him quick,  
 The siphon stutters in the archaic night,  
 The flesh is willing and the soul is sick.

Another drink: Adam is back in the Garden—  
 Another drink: the snake is back on the tree.  
 Let your brain go soft, your arteries will harden;  
 If God's a peeping-tom he'll see what he shall see.

Another drink: Cain has slain his brother.  
 Another drink: Cain, they say, is cursed.  
 Another and another and another—  
 The beautiful ideologies have burst.

A bottle swings on a string. The matt-grey iron ship,  
 Which ought to have been the Future, sidles by  
 And with due auspices descends the slip  
 Into an ocean where no auspices apply.

Take away your slogans; give us something to swallow,  
 Give us beer or brandy or schnapps or gin;  
 This is the only road for the self-betrayed to follow—  
 The last way out that leads not out but in.

## BABEL

There was a tower that went before a fall.  
 Can't we ever, my love, speak in the same language?  
 Its nerves grew worse and worse as it grew tall.  
 Have we no aims in common?

As children we were bickering over beads—  
 Can't we ever, my love, speak in the same language?  
 The more there are together, Togetherness recedes.  
 Have we no aims in common?

Exiles all as we are in a foreign city,  
 Can't we ever, my love, speak in the same language?  
 We cut each other's throats out of our great self-pity—  
 Have we no aims in common?



## BABEL

Patriots, dreamers, die-hards, theoreticians, all,  
Can't we ever, my love, speak in the same language,  
Or shall we go, still quarrelling over words, to the wall?  
Have we no aims in common?

W. S. GRAHAM

## EXCEPT NESSIE DUNSMUIR

Smiling locked round with calling that she is  
Over fallen firstfelt nothing so sad is said  
As white-killed cunning over her stained eye.  
For she grew richly up singing weedwater high  
As wallflowers round her shy child her fairest  
April and prodigal tongue that looped in a spray  
Wades the three wounds from Calder's precious home.  
The hall and the hay-hat where she lay dashed  
From Dechmont Hill meant for my iron fingers,  
Lay knit as the golden mother in a field  
And folded more heart than my discovered bird.

We all must, you as my hill and heart and dead  
Dark weight of seas turned load behind my eye,  
Die and burn down sin from the child's gean tree.  
Easily women welcome in their tombs  
With pointed tongues the pearl in the vein,  
And once encountered, laid with a lid of eyes  
Marry the rain-knocked sandstone for the child  
That in the chill eye counts the kindling crows.

Except my tongue dipped in the weeding girl  
Except her arrival over the sour grass blessed  
With the red word out of her cried-out enemies.  
And she by the beggar of a common sake  
Speaks through her licking joy with a drop of grief.  
Call what the earth is quiet on her equal face  
That has a mouth of flowers for the naked grave  
Sucking my thumb and the mill of my pinched words  
In the dumb sneaked room chiming dead in my ear.  
Now time sooner than love grows up so high  
Is now my warfare wife locked round with making.

# NEXT MY SPADE'S GOING

Next my spade's going the pivoting beetle  
Overthrows windier masters than  
My mountain scaffold.  
What simple miracle, my mile to topple,  
My words leave hold  
On oystercatching birds that settle  
On aquarium clouds above my field.  
My eyes leave hold on cattle.

Silence that makes each grain spin thunder  
Litters rebellious whispers down  
On the roof of soil.  
And the acting pyramid bleeding under  
Holds up the tragic gland of summer  
For reason in my foot to kill  
For the spike of my vertical to spoil.  
I sing in each cave in cinder.

All faster histories trace the acrobat  
Turning with pockets of myrtle  
In under the tongue of the tempest  
Sung under the walls of the water-rat.  
A war falls past.  
No wing on the worm. No clouds create.  
My youth will build quick to hoist  
The bulb through the snare of the athlete.

Matters the moon to beetles in thunder?  
Who sees how silently the mist  
Begins ascent  
Through gut and keel of each moving cancer?  
O see how fastly  
The splaying anchor holds the swept flower  
Safe off the squalling shoal sent windily  
Over the scalp of the whisper.



JOHN S. SPINK

# THE STRATEGIC RETREAT OF THE LEFT

THE notions of 'political warfare' and 'ideological strategy' are now firmly established. They provide a useful analogy which can be applied to the analysis of the backward shift which has taken place recently in discussions on political and moral topics, and which has resuscitated, as unsolved problems, controversies in which the issues seemed perfectly plain a generation ago. Translated into strategic terms, this shift appears as a retreat of the Left on a wide front to positions on which the Fascist onslaught, which imposed it, can best be resisted. It has implied the temporary abandonment of the Marxist, and a return to the humanitarian idealist, criticism of society.

The greatest new material force which appeared in Europe in the inter-war years was that of German heavy industry, reorganized and expanded from 1924-28 onwards. This expansion was planned, or rather plotted, on the level of huge financial deals, disposing of enormous credits from international loans. It did not appear in response to an expanding demand for steel. It was, therefore, a monstrous, cancerous growth, and when it reached maturity it found no outlet for its productive capacity. The aims and ambitions of the owners of this powerful new material force were not to be separated from the sheer mechanics of its functioning, that is to say that they were directed solely to the providing of outlets for its products. They were not the soul of this new body, quantitatively separate from it. They were its brain. The soul of the new Frankenstein monster was an *ersatz* soul, a hotch-potch of pre-existent nationalist aspirations, philosophical half-truth, thirst for power, brute passion and intellectual dexterity, devilishly efficient in the field of applied psychology, which goes under the name of Nazism. Nazism does not fit into the structure of European thought. In the whole range of political and philosophical tenets, held from the extreme Left to the extreme Right, there is no place for Nazism, though it borrows terminology and

concepts from many political philosophies. Nazism is the brutish soul of a monstrous body, a Caliban, belonging to the natural, not the moral sphere. No system of moral concepts exists which can embrace Nazism in its span.

It is German imperialism in this brutish form, and no mere failure in the realm of ideas, that has forced upon the progressive forces of Europe a strategic retreat. Nothing short of the seizure of German heavy industry by the German working class, and, either its partial dismantling, or its adaptation to the needs of the U.S.S.R., could have influenced the course of events. The citadel was not taken and the retreat began.

No front was formed in Germany against the Fascist onslaught; and all the positive moral forces in Germany, beginning from the Left, were successively wiped out. From that time German intervention in the affairs of Europe has been adequately assessable in terms of material force only, without any positive moral value. On the plane of ideas Hitlerite Germany can produce only falsehood; on the moral plane only evil.

German material force tipped the balance in Spain. In France it passed over the country, in 1940, as a duster passes over a blackboard, obliterating the most delicate mathematical niceties. Steel and lead have been in the most literal sense the standard of all things German, and steel and lead have no place in an ideological scheme. That is why every positive moral force in Europe is ranged against Nazism, and why every quisling sacrifices his soul.

Before this force of nature retreat was inevitable. It remained to be seen in which direction the retreat could be made as a strategic retreat and not as a rout. There was only one direction which did not lead to quisling capitulation. That was back along the main line of development of modern progressive thought back from Marxism to Utopian Socialism, from Utopian Socialism to Humanitarian Liberalism, and, if the worst came to the worst, back to Nationalism and frank xenophobia. The important thing was to keep one's face to the future, however far back one might be driven.

Across the Channel this has been, not an ideological scheme but the living experience of the whole working class. In the months that followed the collapse the French workers made the retreat consciously and unflinchingly. But so deep has the iron entered into their souls, so great has the emotional pressure



become, that the fanatical patriotism thus engendered reaches the level of a Greek tragedy. It is from precisely this cup, drunk to the very dregs, that has come some of the purest poetry of our time, *Le Crève-Cœur* and *Les Yeux d'Elsa*, by the Communist poet Louis Aragon, and the heart-rending cry of the steel-worker Timbault as he faced the German firing squad at Chateaubriant on the 22nd of October 1941: 'Vive la France! Vive le parti communiste allemand!' In those simple words are implicit the full span and the highest pitch of the European conscience.

The retreat began with the Popular Front movement. In this country the Labour Party refused to adopt the new strategy and clung hard to the positions it was accustomed to fighting on. Sir Stafford Cripps accepted it and his present position is the logical outcome of accepting it: what was, at the outset, a purely political retreat has become an ideological one; the change took place when the frontier between Socialism and Progressive Liberalism was reached.

In French political life a new front was created, in London, after the collapse, on the line of the Principles of 1789, which meant that all groups to the Left of the Radicals consented to an ideological retreat from the positions of 1871 and 1848. But the situation is now so tense in France that the purely rational ideological line of 1789 no longer suffices in the exalted emotional atmosphere, and straightforward hatred of the *Boche* tends to take its place for all but the most politically conscious. The history of English thought offers no firm line comparable to that of 1789 on which to rally, and no attempt has yet been made to crystallize 'defensive-progressive' thought around a great event in our history. The notion of the 'common man', for instance, arouses no inspiring memories; the 'common man' has no ancestors to compare with *les hommes de quatre-vingt-treize*, who faced undaunted all the kings of Europe.

The Popular Front movement did not succeed in becoming an ideological front in this country because the executive of the Labour Party was persuaded that it constituted a popular front in itself; that, because it grouped the vast majority of working-class votes, it therefore adequately reflected in itself the full span of progressive opinion. Moreover, the Labour Party suffered from a certain rigidity of concepts which more than once led to its being out-maneuvred by the more supple Conservative Party, which,

though guided by the principle that it must remain in power at all costs, gave proof of a ready opportunism and won elections on its opponents' platform.

The Left Book Club made some progress towards the establishment of an ideological front, but the Strachey-Gollancz campaign for a progressive movement based on humanitarian values, which was the L.B.C.'s crowning effort, made little headway in the stagnant year which followed the outbreak of war. At that time the Communists were insisting on returning to the offensive on the Leninist line of 1917, and campaigning far out in front of a retreating army on positions which grew rapidly more isolated. Their offensive was conditioned by what seemed to be a profound hesitation and even retreat on the part of German Fascism, which had attempted to come to terms with the Soviet Union. Their policy offered a superficial resemblance to the pacifist defeatism of some social-democrats (especially in France) and the appeasers on the Right. But the fundamental difference appeared after the Nazi victories in France, when the pacifists became quislings along with the appeasers, while the Communists joined the patriotic front and were soon in the front rank of the resistance. After hanging on in shell-holes, battered by the artillery of both sides, opposed to an imperialist war and to an appeasers' peace, the English party, a skirmishing party, rallied to the main body when the U.S.S.R. itself reeled under the Fascist onslaught.

The abandonment of the Marxist criticism of society and the return to humanitarian idealism has led to a considerable revaluing of old positions. Values which history had outworn have regained their old validity as positive values; words which had ceased to have any meaning have once again the significance of war-cries. The turn of the tide has refilled the channels of old controversies.

The Marxist criticism of humanitarian idealism was not directed against humanitarian idealism as a vision of a future society, but as a means whereby that vision could be realized. Marxist analysis led to the conclusion that the new society could only be established by a revolutionary working class. It did not deny that the commercial class had created high moral values and a civilization of great worth: it stated simply that the spread of those values, of goodwill and enlightenment, would never end in Socialism, nor would Socialism ever result as the sum of partial gains secured by trade union or other pressure.

The object of Marxist criticism is humanitarian idealism, not Fascism. In the face of Fascism it has therefore been necessary to abandon the whole position and return to the humanitarian idealism which was the starting point of Marxist criticism. Humanitarian idealism is the logical antithesis of all that Fascism represents; whenever humanitarian idealism says 'yes', Fascism says 'no'. Humanitarianism is the 'Judeo-bolsheviko-masonic-democracy' of the Nazis. It is, therefore, on the basis of humanitarian idealism that can best be defended—against the mental nihilism and moral cynicism of the Nazis—the structure of intellectual and moral concepts of which Marxism is itself a function.

On the new front Left thinkers find themselves allied with many with whom they had had little contact. The alliance stretches at times as far as the Roman Catholic bishops of Vichy France, who recently protested, in the name of Christian humanitarianism, against the persecution of the Jews. In the newspaper world the tacit alliance extends as far as the *Observer*. In the case of the *Observer* the mountain has come some little way towards Mahomet; however that may be, this paper, which made its policy clear in its editorial of 1st November, now forms the right flank of an unbroken front of which the *Daily Worker* is the left flank.

Meanwhile the Nazis have overrun the Marxist positions and reversed their guns. The doctrines elaborated by them and by their quisling henchmen of the Déat stamp appear at first sight very 'advanced'. Their criticism of British and American imperialism, their reviews of economic history, relating the appearance of a Liberal social structure to the needs of a commercial and industrial owning class for free markets and free labour, are the guns of Marxism, but reversed. They are a parody of Marxism. One of the greatest disservices Fascism has done to thinking men is the systematic distortion of concepts; those of 'revolution' and 'European' are other obvious examples. What distinguishes true Marxist materialism from the fake Nazi brand is that Marxist materialism presupposes the idealism it refutes and cannot exist without it. It is a materialism only as a function, or, better, a counterpart of idealism. 'Refutes' is here used advisedly. The history of thought abounds in theories which exist primarily as negations of previous theories and are therefore dependent on the



theories they refute. Some look towards the past and have no future in them: their value is negative. Others are pregnant with the future and their value is positive. Divorced from such a conception the history of thought would be the history of falsehood, whereas it is the story of the truth.

In the wide sense Marxism participates in that hope of the future, in that 'future-positive' quality, which distinguishes idealism and without which realism becomes cynicism, naturalism becomes hedonism, and education, conditioning. In the narrower sense Marxism has its roots as firmly in German idealism as in the materialism of the sciences. Though taking 'matter' for its highest general statement, it needs, on the level of the first deductions, the concepts of consciousness on the one hand and law on the other. It does not, however, use them as dual 'substances', but as 'processes'. They are considered as being interpenetrable. It is *law* penetrating into *consciousness* that generates *liberty*. To use Hegel's expression—'Liberty is the recognition of necessity'. *Law* is conceived as a relation, as in the sciences. The relation termed 'production relationship', that is to say the relationship between man and man in the production of the necessities of life is taken as being basic in the study of the development of societies. The term 'exploitation' denotes a special form of 'production relationship'. The presence or absence, or the degree of 'exploitation', will explain the characteristic features of a society.

This philosophical background of Marxism participates of the best of the European philosophic tradition. But for the Nazi this philosophical background does not exist, and the only philosophical background Italian Fascism can call upon is the 'logico-positivism' of Pareto, which is a merely cynical denial of all human values.

If, before the Nazis reversed them, one had stood (as so many thinkers of the Left *did* stand) just behind the guns of Marxism, and then had returned (like a war correspondent) to the rear, one would have found oneself in the company of those who, like Stephen Spender, were looking 'forward from Liberalism'. But the clever young man who broadcasts from Germany his materialist conception of history could make no such retreat, because he cannot say with the Marxist '*unfortunately* this is true', for in that '*unfortunately*' echoes the voice of the idealist, the voice of generations of earnest men.

The backward shift of the principal terrain of discussion has brought on to the field, from beyond its previous limits, positive reaction as distinct from Conservatism, in exactly the same way as clothes rationing has brought from the wardrobe many old suits long discarded; the tailor waits ahead, but out of reach; the wardrobe lies behind. Up to the present time no movement comparable to French reaction has appeared, in the open, in this country. But the backward shift has brought within the scope of controversy an openly reactionary document, the 'Report on Education', which the Conservative Party seems likely to disavow.

Such is the dialectic of the history of thought that the principle of *Service* on which the Report lays such stress resembles an important Socialist principle, and contradicts the *Enlightened Self-Interest* of Liberal philosophies, and I daresay that, in the right company, supporters of the Report might quote the unselfish sacrifice consented to by Soviet youth as an illustration of their own principle. But it is not with anything Russian that the principles of the Report can be compared, but with the philosophy of life preached by the Vichy reactionaries. The Vichy reactionaries reject the moral values created by the last two centuries and return for inspiration to the seventeenth century. They reject, that is to say, the Naturalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, summed up in the affirmation that the completest development and expression of the personality is the highest moral good, and return to the anti-naturalistic ideal of renunciation for its own sake, of discipline for its own sake, of service to the State (not to humanity), to the moral conceptions which flourished under the absolute monarchies, in the rigidly hierarchical States of the seventeenth century.

The English Liberal philosopher, John Morley, writing, in 1886, his chapter on Rousseau's treatise on education, *Emile*, unites the thinking of the two centuries and puts the matter in a nutshell: 'The palsied and crushing conception of this helpful and excellent being (man), as a poor worm, writhing under the vindictive and meaningless anger of an omnipotent tyrant in the large heavens, only to be appeased by sacerdotal intervention, was fading back into those regions of night, whence the depth of human misery and the obscurisation of human intelligence had once permitted its escape, to hang evilly over the Western world

for a season. So vital a change in the point of view quickly touched the theory and art of the upbringing of the young. Education began to figure less as the suppression of the natural man, than as his strengthening and development' (Rousseau, II, 201).

For the eighteenth-century materialist philosopher Diderot, Nature is the source of all virtue, all beauty and all truth. And to take the other extreme of the philosophic scale, absolute idealism, we find the English philosopher Bosanquet discussing, at the beginning of this century, the same fundamental ethical issue, however different his terminology may be from that of Rousseau and Diderot. For Bosanquet, the 'mind' or 'world' of an individual is that complex of experience, which makes up the process of the individual's history; the richer, the fuller, the wider the circle of experience the more the 'mind' ('world') exists and the higher the good that can be attained to. The following is from a passage in his Gifford Lectures on *Individuality and Value* delivered in 1911, which according to the lecturer 'contains the root of the matter'. He is replying to the best argument that can be levelled against him. 'This apparent fact, that a plain, ignorant mind may be good, and one refined and cultured in the highest degree may be bad, is what is commonly alleged against us. And what is true in the objection leads to a most striking verification of our point of view' (p. 46). The difficulty is solved by the application of the principle of *Value* to the principle of *Individuality*. The refined and cultured mind may have a completely negative value; in that case the plain and ignorant mind will have a more positive value than the cultured mind, but its positive value will not be of a high order.

If this test of Value is applied to the issue between service to the State and service to humanity, it will be seen that service to the State may be great, but have a negative value if the State be evil; whereas humanity, being a universal conception, can never have a negative value, and service to it can never, therefore, have a negative value. Bosanquet half accepts and half balks at this conclusion in *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. His hesitation is due to his absolute idealism, which subordinates, in the last analysis, the principle of *Value* to that of *Individuality*. He refuses to admit 'mankind' as a 'state of consciousness', and therefore gives to the State an all but ultimate value.

It is on this level that Marxism clashes with absolute idealism.



Marxism rejects the identification of 'mind' and 'world', and replaces it by objective realism, which for Lenin (in *Materialism and Impirio-criticism*) is a synonym of materialism. Marxism can therefore save the principle of *Value* from dependence on *Individuality*, and can conceive of it as *Consciousness* penetrating into *Law*.

From the other side absolute idealism was radically rejected, in France, by the reactionary traditionalists, among whom one can cite Paul Bourget as being half-way between philosophy and politics. But in Maurice Barrès we find the principle of *Individuality* (divorced from the test of *Value*) developing into an exasperated egotism, and later, when he had substituted the notion of *Nation* for that of the *Individual*, into a sort of 'national egotism', called *Integral Nationalism*. It is interesting to note that because the dividing line between Left and Right stands at present so far to the Right, the Fighting French find the memory of Barrès on their side of the fence, and Pétain finds that of Bourget on his.

In France the issue between humanitarianism and reaction has long been perfectly clear, and the French reactionaries have made no secret of their hankering after the reign of Louis XIV. They are allied with a pre-Cartesian school of philosophers of whom Chevalier, the first Vichy Minister of Education, is one of the principal representatives.

Soviet education, on the other hand, presupposes a naturalism as pronounced as that of Rousseau's *Emile*. Soviet youth makes a religion of life, and seeks avidly and with no sense of guilt for all the joys that life has to offer. And it is to defend its ideal of a new and glorious life that Soviet youth sacrifices life itself. When youth's fundamental attitude to life is positive and welcoming, then discipline, freely consented, even when pushed to Spartan limits, and sacrifice, even when pushed to the point of self-abnegation, have nothing in common with the brutally conditioned mania for suicide of the Hitler *Jugend*, or the morbid renunciation which our modern reactionaries would seek to instil amid a chorus of *mea culpa* and *de profundis*.

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What of the future? When the principal Fascist danger has been averted by the victory of the United Nations, will the new

Reaction develop strongly in an England weakened to the point of exhaustion by her present effort? Will the enlarged progressive movement retain its cohesion on this second front? Or, in an England robust enough to recover rapidly and face the future boldly, will a new offensive of the Left become possible and, therefore, justifiable? If the above analysis is correct, such an offensive could only take one shape, and that is a return to the Marxist criticism of the present phase of optimistic idealism. Some bold men will take this step. But the issues will be very confused, and many sincere thinkers will, in the name of Liberty and Democracy, turn their backs upon the future, and many, in the name of Socialist planning, will help to fasten upon their country the strait-jacket of monopoly capitalism. If, however—as is not likely to happen—a reorganization of the party structure of English politics could be carried out, then the issues could be clarified. If the Liberal Party, uniting with the Conservative Party, became the left wing of a new national party, it could re-assume the task history assigned to it, and combat reaction within the framework of a capitalist party. And if the Communist Party were accepted into the Labour Party, it could fulfil its rôle of critic of socialist idealism. Both issues would then be fought out within the movements to which they belong, and no longer prevent the national political machine from functioning, and two national parties would face each other before the electorate, and fight out what is, as the example of Germany showed, the paramount political issue of our times, the nationalisation of heavy industry.

## CECIL BEATON

# LIBYAN DIARY

### I

ONCE you have shown your passes, and are admitted into the fraternity inside the barriers of the desert—yes there is a barbed wire entrance to the desert—you will find a spirit comparable to that on a great ship many miles out at sea. Everyone isolated here is working together selflessly towards the same goal,

each person is making his particular piece of effort towards the common cause, with no thought as to promotion or award. The result is most stimulating. In fact, in spite of everything, there is much to feel glad about in the desert.

To whichever service or allied nation he belongs, the stranger will find a welcome that is unimaginable elsewhere. He will be received, without question, not only as an honoured guest, but as a long-lost friend. Everyone is a potential host; everyone seems jovial.

A new code of manners springs up: friendliness reaches such heights that unwritten laws have to be made so that the hospitality that is readily offered must, on occasions, be tactfully refused. No matter to what strain the cook-house has already been put by the difficulties of communications, invitations to share what rations remain will always be pressed, even if an acceptance means your host 'tightening his belt' or 'going dry'. Drivers on the desert road are so generous that hitch-hiking is one of the surest means of transport.

Certain conventions prevail. Not only for hygienic reasons must you bury the *débris* of your picnic meal, but the regulation reads: 'You must leave the desert as you would hope to find it.'

The soldiers enjoy making their criticisms: they resent the poverty of the B.B.C. programmes in comparison to the richness of the German light music; they grumble about the irregularity of the mails, the shortage of reading matter, and the lack of news in the local papers that trickles through from Cairo. Yet, though it could be said that in all the world there can be no more wasteful, heartless and purposeless theatre of war, a more unsuitable habitation for human beings, still the desert possesses its advantages. There can be no more healthy battle ground. Most men are physically fitter than ever before. Life here is primeval. It is simple with the simplicity of the animals: yet it seems that from this simplicity springs a new contentment. In the desert the men are contented, they become 'sand happy'.

In the desert the mess secretaries, like housewives out on shopping expeditions, are always on the look-out for the means of 'coming by' fresh additions to their stores. They will swap sugar and tea for small eggs from the Senussi tribes. Some of them are conscientious enough to keep a dozen hens, and to travel with them in the back of their trucks when they move their camping



sites. Although under battle conditions the hens may not produce enough eggs for breakfast, they supply the wherewithal for an occasional omelette. When on leave, the men spend much time buying up innovations that, when brought to the front lines, become almost literally worth their weight in gold. The trouble spent in these small ways repays every effort, for it is by such trifles that an extra fillip can be given to morale.

Some of the dining-tables in the mess tent are adorned with wild flowers picked from the desert scrub. A certain rivalry stimulates the various messes. I heard one squadron leader, in charge of the camp's messing, after seeing the glass display at the mess at which he had just lunched, telephone back two hundred miles to his orderly telling him that last night's Chianti bottle must be saved and used in future on the table as a water jug.

In the desert one becomes so hungry that each meal is devoured voraciously. Perhaps it is the salt in the air that creates in most men in the desert a craving for sweets and chocolates. Like school-children, soldiers beg their friends to bring them back some toffees from leave. Most Generals manage to preserve a bottle of lollipops on the desk in their caravan.

Life is sometimes baffling for the new arrival in the desert. A great importance is given to numbers that have no apparent significance. There is no explanation as to why 000 Squadron, a few miles away, is at Landing-Ground 42, but, eventually, these figures may acquire a familiar ring in the ear.

Notices put up warning you against particular forms of violent death are sometimes just as casual as if the park authorities had erected a one-foot railing for you to 'keep off the grass'. A cryptic notice reads: 'Mines, keep out'. What particular form of horrors the skull and cross-bones signify I do not know, but, bewildered by these signs, when I saw 'Kill that fly!' posted up, I asked what it meant. 'Kill that fly!' was the reply.

The poverty of the desert has its paradoxes. Whisky is perhaps less rare than ginger beer or soda water; petrol is less scarce than water. Our soldiers have surprised German prisoners by the extravagance of washing out their shirts in petrol. Often a man prefers his water ration to be used for tea than for cooking.

Here, men, who have given up their worldly possessions, live with little other impedimenta than a razor, sleeping-bag, roll of lavatory paper and a packet of cigarettes. Perhaps it may be

comforting to know that, thus far, the life of a soldier in this desert has been preferable to the life in the trenches of 1916.

It is reassuring to learn that it is possible, when life has been reduced to its essentials, to find that there is, after all, more in it.

Although fully conscious that it is a literary crime to publish a diary, I shall now make considerable use of the notes I wrote in the desert.

*Monday, 27 April.* Travelled to the 'Canal zones'. After four weeks from home, I am at last in the desert, my destination from the first. The landscape is eventless and ugly: unvarying scrub-land-dunes, mottled with rubble, hummocks of biscuit colour, square miles of desolation.

The course of the road is marked by old tar barrels. When the track itself is buried (as it often is) after a sandstorm, the barrels stand out, clear and immobile, to guide the lorries on their way to Suez.

*Wednesday.* Went to visit Randolph Churchill, who has rejoined the Commandos, who are doing a preliminary training before the real course starts in three weeks' time. We watched some of the men falling from heights of eighteen feet in various ways: on one foot, on both feet, sideways, backwards: they jumped through a hole in a high rostrum in quick succession, just as if in a troop-carrying aircraft they were given the word to take to the sky. From a complicated structure of iron girders, on trapeze ropes they swung high in the air, while unfastening their parachute harness in a given number of seconds before somersaulting on to the mattress below that represents the sea. They are made to jump from a truck travelling at a speed of thirty-five miles an hour. 'The faster it goes the less you are likely to damage yourself', I was told. The men are considered 'cissies' if they get hurt by doing things the wrong way—the training is pretty tough.

On the way to an air station, where they have the Liberators, we passed many large Prisoners of War camps, guarded by sentries perched high on lookout platforms. But these prisoners are mostly Italians and without urge to escape. Their fate is to be kept penned up in this waste-land behind barbed wire, with little to pass away the days but the interest of three meals a day and a turn at the washing tap.

Another R.A.F. Mess: I talked to several of the men here. They each have interesting stories to tell, if you can get them into the right mood and give them a feeling of friendliness. They enjoy an opportunity to talk to a newcomer. One of them confided: 'It's pretty foul, sometimes, when a bloke you have been with a lot doesn't come back. There was a chap named Jock that everyone liked especially. The day he "had it" the Commanding Officer was absolutely white in the face: "Jock didn't get back," was all he said, and he went off by himself. We felt particularly badly about it as Jock would have got a Bar to his D.F.C. if he'd lived. And there was a fellow named Mac, a swell guy. I had a bad time of it when Mac "had it". He was a grand little chap, only about five feet tall but as brave as a lion—absolutely first class he was. I was the Flight Commander at the time, and we'd had a series of big "do's" over Benghazi. Mac had been out on the previous show, a terrific one, but he begged me to let him go again this time. He was a wizard pilot, had just been made a Pilot Officer, and his enthusiasm was terrific. Well, I let him go. That night the ack-ack was brutal. Buckets of it everywhere. The aircraft were lurching about in a regular fifth of November fireworks display. It's not funny having to "deliver the groceries" in those circumstances. With shells bursting near the side of the plane, at one moment, I thought I would have "had it". Suddenly I saw someone alongside me "had it". There was a terrific explosion which knocked me end over tip and then I saw that one of our bombers had been hit. It looked like a blazing waterfall, bits falling everywhere. It was terrific. When we got back I found out it was Mac who had got that shell. I've never felt so badly about anything before. But the funny thing about it was that some months later we were in the mess, when there, at the other end of the tent, in a Captain's uniform, was the very living image of Mac—I could hardly believe my eyes. I really thought I was seeing things. It made me feel quite rosy. The C.O. came over quietly and said he wanted me to talk to this chap. He was the exact replica of Mac, only wearing glasses and a bit greyer, perhaps even thinner and smaller. We had a drink together, he said he was a Captain in the last war, and talked about nothing in particular, when suddenly he asked if we couldn't go somewhere where it was quiet and he could talk to me alone. "Mac often mentioned you in his letters: Mac was my only son," he said.



Mac was all I cared about in the world, all I had to live for, in fact. My wife had died, my daughter was killed in the bombing at Birmingham and, as you know, Mac has gone. Now I want you to tell me exactly how he met his death. I don't want to be spared anything. I don't want you to think of my feelings, but I'm haunted by the idea of not knowing what happened to him. You must tell me everything."

"But, Sir, I can't do that, we never do."

"But I insist, I want you to tell me exactly what happened, I must know."

"But, Sir, in the Service that's one thing we never talk about, it's just one of those unwritten rules that aren't broken."

"I insist!", the little man said emphatically, beating his fist on his knee, "I told the Commanding Officer that was my intention in wanting to speak to you."

"Well, you can imagine how embarrassed I felt. I called for a double whiskey each, and then another and yet another. After a time we were both well "under way", but I could "take" it better than he could and I gave him more than I took. I started to tell him some stories and he told me some. We roared with laughter, and we had quite a jolly evening until eventually he passed out completely. Two of our fellows had to carry him off and we gave him a bed for the night.

'Poor little chap, it was not at all a "good show" really, and I felt rather badly about what I had done. But what else could I do? I mean it wasn't any good getting morbid, he would only have cried or done something stupid like that.'

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Another evening a young Flight-Lieutenant from Liverpool, with heavy eyebrows and a great smile, told me how he had been to shoot his line. 'Shoot your line mm—how?' I asked. He explained:

'We were quite pleased with ourselves. The Squadron had got a bag of six in two days. We were having a celebration in the mess when Patterson, the orderly, said I was wanted on the telephone.

"We want you to talk on the B.B.C.," some darned voice howled at me.

'I thought it was a gag, told the blighter what I thought of him and hung up.

"Some nut trying to pull my leg," I told the others. They all laughed—"Oh, that's grand, old Beany shooting a line over the air, that'd be first class! Intrepid Birdman! Oh, first class! Ha! Ha!"

'Next morning the bloke called me again—said it was on the level, they wanted me to come to Cairo to talk on the radio. The C.O. had given his O.K. I telephoned the C.O. and told him some ruddy fool was trying to make an ass of me; what did he know about it? Suddenly he gave me a hell of a rocket: "You damned well do as you're told, it's an order; don't ask me stupid questions, and get cracking without wasting more time."

'Well, I didn't mind the idea of having a "shufti"<sup>1</sup> in Cairo, not that I like Cairo any, but it's good to get a bath and an ice-cold drink. Well, I arrived at the B.B.C. place feeling rather a fool.

"Have you had time to write anything!" a bloke asked me.

"Write anything, me write? I've never written anything in my life."

"Well, you were on that daylight sweep over Martuba, weren't you?—we want you to broadcast to London about it tonight on the nine o'clock news. Well now, you just make some notes, saying what happened, quite straightforward. People want to know what it feels like, you know. It was a jolly good show."

"That's a hell of an order to give a chap in cold blood," I said, "got anything to steady me?"

"Why, sure." He produced some whiskey, a bottle of it, damned good stuff too, and it helped a lot. I put down a few notes, but there isn't much to say, is there? What's the point of pretending the bombs, dropped by the bombers we were escorting, looked like bursting oranges, or balls of fire, or any sort of balls, or that the ME 109's fell out of the sky like confetti. Anyhow, when I had done what I could the bloke said it was not exciting enough. You haven't told us anything, he said.

'So we had to go over it together. He asked me a lot of damn-fool questions, and I said "Yes" to almost everything. After a terrific sweat we concocted some terrific line-shooting tripe, ending up "It certainly was just a piece of cake."

"Have it your own way," I said.

'The bloke smiled, "Now you go off and come back at three o'clock and we'll make a record of it."

<sup>1</sup>A look around.

"Almighty!" The thought of that didn't make me feel too good. Oh, what the hell! I went off and had a damned good lunch and I felt swell and forgot all about the broadcast. It was wizard being in a nice cool hotel with lots of women about.

'It's quite a change having a "shufti" around Cairo after the desert.

'Well, somehow or other it was 4.30 when I got back to the B.C. The bloke had a look at me, and said: "Had a good lunch, eh? Well, you'd better rehearse the thing first, hadn't you?"

"Rehearse nothing, shoot!"

'Well, the first time I did it fine, except I gave a hiccough in the middle of a word. At the second crack I didn't hiccough, but somehow or other I read the same sentence twice running. Would you believe it, I had to do the damn thing four times! I was completely "brassed off" with the whole damned thing, but when it was over the bloke gave me another drink, and then just one more to finish the bottle.

'The chaps made a hell of a noise when they heard me shooting my line on the mess radio. It wasn't too bad, though, really. They won't pay you anything, of course, but still I got a free bottle of whiskey out of it.'

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The Commanding officer of another station, a keen amateur photographer, and a man of schoolboy enthusiasms, most hospitably invited me to visit his station and stay with him. He has a bungalow on the sea front.

At breakfast next morning we were given eggs and bacon, but the eggs were ducks' eggs and so big and iridescent that neither of us had stomach for them. Suddenly the air was rent with gunfire. In the next door garden a small Arab boy withmelon-shaped turban ran out past the roses, knocking the arumies on his way to the wall overlooking the sea. The scene was the epitome of a child's delight: on the blue water, invasion barges were practising, and other toy-like ships were letting off their pompom guns. The small boy looked out longingly across the water—for this boy war was a glorious affair, full of lovely surprises—but a grey-haired woman, with a basket, bustled out of the house, passed the wicker cages, and with a sharp word sent the Arab boy to get on with his morning's work.



*Friday.* Went to the air stations at Edku. In a tent the secret maps showing our desert emplacements and landing grounds are hidden.

Tea, with stale bread, out of a chipped enamel mug, was a foretaste of the poverty of the desert. All the men hospitable and high spirited. One of them had been a portrait painter before the war. Squadron Leader Reed, with a large twisted moustache that tried in vain to give its owner's face an adult look, was the nicest, most intelligent, and most gentle of the lot.

As we were about to leave, word came through that two Belgian pilots had shot down two Dornier flying-boats. The two victors would soon be back, we must wait for them. It was wonderful to see such childlike delight on the part of all, everyone as pleased as Punch, the Commanding Officer beaming. 'Say, I'll chalk that up,' said the man who works the board in the 'Ops. room'. A success like this is the *raison d'être* for the existence here of these men. The aircraft and its guns had been used for the purpose for which they were intended: a small gain scored against the enemy. Now the Germans would have to recall faster types of aircraft for protection of convoys. We drank beer and ate thousands of monkey nuts in the mess bar while we waited. Then the aircraft were sighted, they circled low beneath the windows—we ran out to greet them. The pilots appeared, legs first from the belly of their respective aircraft. One Belgian, a quiet, good-looking athlete, tall and thin: the other heavy, more brutish. They were old school friends. They had both escaped at the collapse of Belgium, leaving behind their parents—the owners of large fortunes and families. This was their first victory. They told their stories with a good deal of modesty, haltingly. They had been directed to a certain point where they were told they would find a convoy, an oil tanker and some other small ships. They found them all right, but the Dorniers accompanying them were a surprise gift. After the interrogation the Public Relations Officer badgered them for a 'story'. The others stayed around beaming and continuously slapping them on the back. 'That's grand old So and So shooting his line! Go on, shoot your line.' Is it to be expected that, under these circumstances, the pilots are able to give much of a story? The Public Relations Officer, embarrassed yet tenacious, continued: 'Well, you must say something. Was it a wizard show? Was it a "piece of cake"? 'Yes, it was a

'piece of cake'!' replied the Belgians, grateful that the hackneyed expression should be put in their mouths—if now they could be left in peace and go off for a shave and a cup of tea.

Later the Belgians asked us if we could give them a lift back to Alexandria. Certainly. After the first excitement of their return had worn off, they began to talk calmly to one another about their day's experiences. It would then have been possible for the Public Relations Officer to get a different story from the usual account, but he had already telephoned his 'piece of cake' message for the hundredth time. The big, heavyweight Belgian, ruminated 'It's funny how much you can see in a split second, it's like a tremendously fast snapshot. I could see those men on the tanker, some falling on their backs, some running to the guns. They all fled in different directions as I zoomed down towards them, some of them seemed to somersault with terror. They looked like ants. It was really quite funny.' The other Belgian told of his experience. The Dornier made a spurt, but it was soon silenced. The pilot must have been killed, the rear-gunner certainly was. It was all over in a few seconds. Their guns went off, but the shooting was pretty bad—pretty bad.'

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In the motor transport, piled like a pack mule, and with every cubic inch of space taken up with our luggage, camp-bedding, wash basins, beer bottles, tinned fruit juices, bully beef and other provisions, we started our trek forward into the desert. Rattling over a rough road running parallel to the sea we passed a featureless, forlorn desolation, a world seemingly without end, its emptiness broken at one point by the presence of some scraggy fig trees that never grow tall or bear fruit. This desert is a scrubland without interest, a drab mottled succession of dun colour stretching in all directions like an emptied sea. This desert of slag is a very different desert from the Sahara, or the one in the fiction of Robert Hichens, where beautiful dunes elaborately combed and dappled by the zephyrs are comprised of a soft canary coloured powder. This is a desert in terms of desolation. It is as impure and drab as a dump heap. The plains are of small useless stones, of grit, rock splinters, and the vegetation is dry and unsympathetic. One wonders that even a camel can digest the patches of prickly veitch.

Later the desert road became less rough and its tarred surface lined with the empty tar cans. These barrels become a prevailing feature of this desert road and are occasionally marked with hieroglyphic or number as an indication to the initiated of the whereabouts of a landing group or camp. At home, to motor for hundred miles is considered quite a long run: here in the desert no one thinks anything of driving for six or eight hours on end along an empty road. It is under such conditions that one comes to know the intellectual and spiritual faculties of one's fellow travelers and companions. Distances here are so great, the scale is so incomprehensively large that it is difficult to understand how warfare can be carried out in this arid world. How any 'lines of battle can exist, let alone be 'held', is beyond my comprehension. A regiment is soon reduced to the proportion of a pinprick in this terrain, yet even so, against the danger of aerial attack a platoon must be dispersed into little pockets of isolated men and equipment.

In the evening the sun lowered itself on the windscreen of our lorry, and when this ball of light sank behind the horizon we were treated to a show of magic beauty. More transient than the most delicate flower, more brilliant than any jewel, more fluid than any architecture, more varied than any terrestrial landscape was the landscape in the sky: islands of gold and silver, peninsulas of black and rose floated against a background of many shades of turquoise and azure. The activity of the sky changing so quickly yet apparently motionless, made the earth below look even more barren and forlorn. Only the straight ribbon of road in front of us became reflected pink. As if to shame the dun drabness of the desert these colours are applied with tremendous gusto and conviction. They are colours that painters would be timid of bringing together. The wisps of gold islands in the sky dispersed, the moon came up in exchange. It is only at this twilight or by moonlight that the desert becomes beautiful, the light turning the sand to powder, the sky to opal. In the blue light of the moon the undulating landscape and white hillocks sprinkled with clusters of thick black bushes, solid and squat, and clumps of feathery palm trees reminded me of the Patinir landscape in the National Gallery. Suddenly switching off our road to the right towards the sea we come upon our goal, the Army and R.A.F. Public Relations camp at Bagush. The Public Relations camp is a sort of desert hotel of



doss-house for travelling news-hawks and propagandists—each evening new arrivals appear for shelter. Generally those that are expected fail to appear and are replaced by unexpected arrivals. This camp is situated in the base area and is looked upon as the Ritz of the desert—the place to which jaded war correspondents return from the front line to recuperate in the comparative comforts and the amenities of the seashore.

To find such luxury here was indeed a surprise. The tent in which I slept was large and spacious, equipped with an electric light, garden furniture and telephones. In the mess before dinner an officer was instructing two orderlies to swat a moth that had crept into the tent. What would they say at home if I wrote to tell them of our dinner tonight: eggs, tinned salmon, steak and a chocolate pudding, all served with a formality that might have irritated me if it had not seemed so humorously incongruous? At one point I had a *fou-rire*. The mess quartermaster in an intimate, confiding manner to the orderlies was keeping up a running whispering campaign during the dinner, like a nervous hostess. Out of the corner of his mouth he would make an aside to a corporal 'clear away the salad plates'; continuously the pantomime of beckoning the orderlies was repeated: 'Crockery away again'—'butter away'—and, a little later, 'Tell that orderly to pull up his sock.'

The moonlight made the sandbags silver white, the sky was full of interesting wisps of cloud, stars and the shooting stars of the Ack-ack. The distant bombardment rumbled ominously. The night's sleep was interrupted by dogs howling each time bombs dropped or guns fired. Yet the war seemed remote, more remote for some inexplicable reason here than when reading about it in the *Evening Standard*, when coming home in the Underground at the rush hour. Lying in the tent, the desert, in the moonlight, appears like sifted sugar.

We listen to the German radio for the quality of their music, which, relayed by the hour, is so much better than ours. We all listen to 'Lili Marleen', a tango sung by a woman named Anderson with a seductive voice. This tune has become to Germany what 'Tipperary' was to us in the last war. The story of its success is surprising. When the Germans first took control of the radio in Belgrade they had a spare fifteen minutes to fill up their programme—what to do? A soldier, nearby, said, 'How

about playing this, it's my favourite gramophone record. It's old and rather scratched but it's good.' It was the record of 'Lili Marleen' that had been made by Anderson in Berlin several years ago. It had not been a success. Anderson became impecunious. But that night when the record was played in Belgrade again many thousands wrote in to ask who was the singer, what was the song?—a big success. Each time the record was played its reception was more rapturous. Now whenever the song is sung in Germany, in night clubs, in restaurants, the whole assembly stands and joins in singing. Anderson has been brought from obscurity to remake the record, has become a national heroine and spends all her time singing this song. Three times a night it is released over the air to the troops. It is because we are unable to produce any song to compare with it, that, night after night, our men in the desert listen to 'Lili Marleen'. I lay pondering on the incongruities of war and it struck me as ironical that at the same time hearing the reverberation of the bombs at Mersa Matruh, I, in common with so many of our troops, should be listening to the musical programmes of the enemy radio.

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The Bedouins, in the wadis near the shore, watching the battle wage backwards and forwards along the tableland, consider the protagonists mad. They see first one army and then another retiring in haste, leaving behind a wonderful amount of loot. The Bedouins steal forward and they sell this loot to the conquering army. A few months later the victors are vanquished again the Arabs find great booty. They are the only people, thus far, to win on this hazardous chessboard, where invariably the winner loses with his long lines of communication. Only the Arabs understand how to live here in the desert. They have learnt little else. After the battle, in which tanks are set on fire and their occupants fried alive, and the fluid field of battle is deserted, the Arabs arrive to pick up, among the useless relics and impedimenta of destruction, the gold rings, wrist-watches, cameras and souvenirs from the stiffened bodies lying in the sun. They will see the silver strap of a wrist-watch that is worth fifteen pounds for a few pounds of sugar. Occasionally they are punished with the loss of an eye, hand or arm, for the Germans sometimes leave behind them fountain pens and thermos' which, when opened

ignite the secret fuse, so that an explosion follows. A pretty trick, eh!

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The wind manages to blow a considerable amount of sand into the canvas tent, though its windows and exits are sealed. Outside, a lack of light gives the scene the quality of a dull winter's day in England. The sun is obscured by a thick haze of sand. 'But this is nothing,' they said. 'You wait.'

The haze becomes a pall. The effect is now of a thick November fog. A hot wind brings with it clouds of biscuit-coloured grit that sting and irritate the nerves. The sand in eyebrows and lashes makes an albino of everybody. Henceforth it is impossible to get a comb or even the fingers through one's hair.

The storm of sand, which may continue for days, brings life to a standstill. 'The only thing to do is to wrap a towel around your head and sleep the sleep of hibernation until it is all over.'

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Where is war? I come to the desert thinking I am coming nearer to war; yet even here war seems distant.

Where then is war? When interpreted by Whitehall, where the planning of great responsibility is done, thousands of miles from the sound of the guns, it necessarily seems remote. What do I see of war here? I see how much spade work goes on continuously behind the lines, the running of Maintenance Units, of repairs to telephones and cars, the arranging of the never-ending difficulties of transport. I see the delays and disasters caused by incompetent people in charge of communications, motor lorries and telephones. I see the life of most people in the desert has not the proportion of their surroundings. I see how many hours of dreary waiting and inconvenience must be endured each day. I see the way messages are sent and received in the desert, how the mail bag arrives and its contents are doled out. I see the orderlies, mere schoolboys, playing soldiers, bringing in tea, repairing the accumulator on a lorry, and, for the first time, I feel that, in spite of their strange environs, life here is not very different from what it might have been back at home before the war. An officer in this mess, an enthusiastic 'balletomane', one of that curious number that has sprung up throughout the world since the death of Diaghileff, though one would expect him to be cut off from his natural



interests, yet finds time in the intervals of his job to play a selection of ballet music for hours on end on the gramophone in his tent. Certain young, undeveloped officers find themselves with an almost limitless number of servants to order about; admittedly they would not have found themselves in that position in civilian life, and this power goes to their head. Doubtless custom will mend matters.

I find that, in spite of its appalling disadvantages, desert life has its recompenses, and I come to realize that all these aspects are as real a part of war as another. 'I've never had so much fun as now,' said a friend of mine while firing at the Germans, but he was carried away by his enjoyment and was soon taken prisoner. But he cannot be said to be a more intrinsic part of war than the orderly lighting the Primus stove. The chores are as actual a part of war as the excitement. The men here are generally gay and confident, and to them war is a game, but to Englishmen a game is as serious a job as anything else.

In the height of battle, when terror is in the air, war is certainly a grim reality. But it is only this terror that makes it so.

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Lunched with an all-Greek Squadron, who, like the Free French, are flying Hurricanes. Day after day they wait, their eyes greedily searching the sky each time an aircraft passes, for they have yet to gain their first victory (thus far only scoring one 'probable').

In some small way, the desert is overcome by the ant-like determination of all these nationalities to assert themselves. These little pockets, from various nations, have each their particular characteristics. These Greeks had decorated their tent most stylishly with large squares of blue paper, the colour of the Greek flag, in complete contrast to most of the English tents, whose tatty decoration is more crudely improvised. The pictures cut from nudist magazines are adolescent alternatives to actual sex-life, and are an indication of their celibate habits. The lunch of macaroni and meat stew was well cooked, and savoury: the ingredients being the identical rations that are so unappetisingly served in many of the English messes.

*No idea of the date:* I have here more and more the feeling of contentment on the part of the men who live in the desert. Many

of them complain of the cities, which, after months here, they visit on leave. They say the desert is clean, that life is smooth, on an even keel, and that here they become 'nearer to realities'. Some, who have been here a considerable time, begin to lose their memories, acquire a desert asphasia. Perhaps it is as well that this desert, through a trick of fate, has become the picked battlefield. Our armies suffer long periods of inaction under conditions of poverty. Yet it is perhaps better that this waste land should be the theatre of destruction rather than the heavily populated towns where women and children must flee from the sacking of their homes.

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On the way to Mersa Matruh there is a patch of fig trees in a dip of the road, which, after the miles of unending desolation gives the impression of an oasis, and the change of the colour of the earth here is a welcome variation from the drear monotony. A little further on we passed some coco-coloured tracks pimpled with puffs of dark green bushes. This was an event, and after the empty ugliness of the desert, a relief to the eye.

The surprise of coming over a hilltop to find Mersa lying as a panorama below is so delightful that one imagines the town is one of great beauty. So lovely is the effect in the brilliant sunlight with clumps of dark trees, and the buildings with domes, and minarets startlingly white against the blue and emerald sea. It is a landscape that the young Corot would have liked to paint. But on closer inspection it is the position of the town that is intrinsically beautiful. The buildings are ugly. The rows of shops down the streets that are marked 'Smuts' Way' or 'Freyberg Road' are badly shelled. Their white façades still bear the Egyptian signs of the old shops, the baker, the laundry, the hairdresser, but the effects of shelling seem to be worse than those of bombing; the walls may stand but not a roof remains. It is an abandoned, forlorn seaside town. The few people that are hanging about seem lost and pointless. At the Toc H. Headquarters a few soldiers were quite bland, despite the sinister dreamlike atmosphere of emptiness and delay, and seemed content to do nothing but wait until the next turn of events brought activity. Some workmen were putting up a recreation room for the troops 'in transit', and the scene in this half-finished and half-bombed building was depressing in effect. Now the wooden structure, in the course of completion,

looked a futile forlorn effort against the greater mass of old scrap and rubbish of *débris*. To make the atmosphere more poignant a soldier played with one finger on an old battered piano, 'Home Sweet Home', and the carol 'Noël, Noël'. But some of these men have come from the forward lines, and they said, 'This is paradise in comparison with other places, why we've got the sea here.' And true enough this evening the sea looked inviting, of brilliant iridescent blue—the colour of the wings of Brazilian butterflies.

Now to the forward areas. The packing up is like moving house. Bags, folding beds, Primus stoves, provisions, water-cans. We took crates of drink. We bumped and banged, ricocheted from rocks into potholes. The hideous roads seemed endless with many miles of scrub and muck, extending as far as the eye could see.

At Sidi Barani we explored the ruined barracks, which in the late afternoon sun had a fantastic appearance with the shadows thrown by broken walls falling on to vistas of more broken walls. The harsh clear light made the whole scene beautiful. We stayed the night at a landing ground where the young Commanding Officer from the North Country described, in an easy flow of speech that I envied, the life that they lead here. 'It is very quiet with not enough exercise, so that sleeping and eating as much as we do we often need a liver pill. If ever we show a light at night the Germans come and give us hell. The other night they dropped a ring of incendiaries right around the aerodrome, a circle of blazing light. It was a dark night, but you could see the camp lights as if it were the moon period. The noise of the bangs woke us all up and woke up all the birds. There are no fighters around here to shoo them off, so we all got up out of bed. We sat in slit trenches waiting for the next bomb, reading our newspapers by the light of the flares, but nothing much happened, and soon the Hun left us alone. But we couldn't go back to bed, we were just as wide awake as the birds.' This nice fellow described how Andreas, his South African, coal-black batman, had certain unchanging methods that could never be altered. He laid everything out in the tent in rows, and folded his pyjamas in his own particular pattern. Andreas had been worried about the recent visit to the desert of the Duke of Gloucester, representing King George. He said, 'It should be King Edward he represents, surely, he was Prince of Wales when he visited South Africa in 1932.'

'Ah, but he couldn't be King,' said the Commanding Officer. 'He married the wrong woman.' 'Well, why didn't he get rid of her?' asked Andreas.

The pet chameleon is the great personality in the mess. Crawling about on a branch of camel scrub, this little animal catches flies with its long teaser-like, and very disgusting, tongue, that darts out from a distance of twice the length of its body. At breakfast time this performance seemed particularly unattractive to watch, but the boys find in the chameleon a great source of interest. The Commanding Officer said, 'We've had more fun out of it than from magazines.'

The Australians got up earlier than we. They had dressed, teeth brushed, breakfasted, had visited the loo, and were on their precarious journey all in a question of fifteen minutes.

'It looks as if the khamsin is coming up—the dust is already rising—but if it gets any worse then the only thing to do will be to go to bed with a towel round your head. It's awful when it gets really thick, you can't see the tent pegs from the window, you can't see anything six feet in front of you. If you're going on to Gambut you'll never get there, that's all.'

I have noticed out here that one of the forms of being 'funny' is to be pessimistic, to tell a person he is in for a lot of trouble. 'You think you'll get away all right from here, but don't fool yourselves, you'll never get leave.' 'Don't think by going to India you're going to get out of the war.' 'You're going off now, eh?'—well, trust in God, but check your parachute.'

Quite unexpectedly, and within a few minutes, I was given my baptism of sand. Hot winds blew the sand into every crevice of the sealed car, into one's throat, eyes, nose. The wheels of the car added their individual dust-storms and the sand poured over the mudguards like clouds of sulphurous smoke. Sometimes it was impossible to see even a few yards ahead, but occasionally there were patches of road that were clear. When the storm was at its worst the smell was, according to Derek, like new linen. To me it smelt just of stale dust.

At Barani we staggered blindly from the car to get a drink. In the N.A.A.F.I. A lot of begrimed, tousled South Africans were there waiting, after months in the forward areas, to have forty-eight hours of leave. Just as a miller's assistant is covered with flour, so they were covered with a fresh caking of sand. One of them



had a large monkey, Tom, which pulled at the sleeves of anyone who was eating anything for which it had an appetite. But the monkey was the worse for the sand storm, and was in a bad temper. He screamed and yelled like a naughty child.

At the petrol dump five miles away a circle of black Africans sat crouching by the pumps and tanks. In the haze of dust they sat goggled with mica. They reminded me of the bright young things of 1920 for which Oliver Messel designed masks in *Dance, Little Lady*. They sat, as if in the market square of the tropical atmosphere of their home, but so immobile were they that they looked but only half alive, as if they were waiting to come to life when, if ever, the sand storm would subside. The spectacle was almost uncanny. They sat like ghosts, black and emaciated against a mass of black metal petrol-cans looted from the Germans.

The road was clear for a bit, the sun was hidden by sand, but putting your hands outside the car windows you felt the heat of the wind coming laden from the South. This wind could drive one to desperation, especially when the hot sand pricks into the pores of one's skin. The nerves are upset.

The sand storm had abated when we got to Sollum, a badly battered fishing village. The waves were washing through the skeleton of a wrecked ship by the shore. The houses were pockmarked with shell wounds and not a roof remained. We drove by hairpin turns up Sollum Pass, past long-haired, immaculate turbaned Indians, running glibly over Halfaya Pass in pistachio green tanks. The remains of the battle of Halfaya are now half-buried in sand. The salvage people have cleared much from these forlorn remains, but a phenomenon still exists that is far stranger than anything to be found in Surrealist books. A clothing store must have been blown up, hundreds of shirts, neatly folded, are half-buried in sand, some tanks are blown up, so that a rhythm of circular disks stands in diminishing recession. The ground is littered with ammunition, gas masks, water bottles, old boots and letters. The Surrealists have anticipated this battle ground. In all their paintings, now proved to be prophetic, we have seen the eternal incongruities. The carcasses of burnt-out aeroplanes lying in the middle of a vast panorama: overturned trucks, deserted lorries, cars that have been buckled by machine-gun fire, with their under parts pouring out in grotesque, tortured shapes, some unaccountable clothing blown into the telephone wires, or

apery in a tree, the shattered walls, the sunsets of bright, forgettable colours. All these have been faithfully reproduced by Dali, Max Ernst, Joan Miro, long before the war. At an abandoned Italian aerodrome, where dozens of aircraft had been destroyed on the ground, their skeletons looked like prehistoric animals—and one, in particular, was like a sphinx painted by Picasso.

Often one sees aircraft wearing floating draperies, or veiled in fluttering nets, but this is for camouflage.

A North Country soldier was wandering casually among the graves of the German soldiers, their topees, rotting in the sun, crown over the crosses that bear the beastly swastika. A beer bottle, with a piece of paper inside, upturned, with its neck dug into the sand, is all there is to identify the young man who has died in obedience to the abortive inspiration of the paperhanger-use painter. 'Adolf Gross, born 14.12.19, died June 1941.' The North Country soldier places back the bottle. 'It makes you think,' he says.

At Capuzzo the fort no longer exists, Mussolini's memorial is badly battered, his Fascist eagle decapitated and showing, somewhat significantly beneath its solid surface of plaster of Paris, another structure of wire and hair. The old petrol dump marked 'Benzina' has been signed with the autographs of German, Italian and English soldiers, Private David Stories, Staffs., Peppe Alfino, Pavia Division. Capuzzo's memorial to the Germans has also been badly strafed, the German helmets knocked away-whiff from the pilasters by the side entrances.

Bardia, set in the opaque, biscuit distance, appeared white and arid on the promontory of a dark blue sea. The shelled and empty walls of the wrecked houses formed a curious pattern of fawn and white dappled dots and dashes. The buildings of this former seaside resort, the private houses, restaurants, shops, municipal buildings, have housed troops of different nationalities to have, according to the changing fortunes of war, in their rooms, decorated the walls. All have left behind their own wall paintings, some bear witness of sex repression. Now these buildings are deserted and are unsafe for habitation. The church is condemned. But for a few goats that, unattended, were feasting on a bush of oleander, the town appeared to be deserted.

The poverty of the desert is such, that almost anything found in

the forward areas is put to some further use than that for which was intended. Some of the mess secretaries go scouring the remainder of the battle area for 'finds'. If any tiles are found in the bathrooms of wrecked houses these are preserved as mats for a teapot or as table top covering. I have seen a man filling empty beer bottles to various heights with oil. This he sets light to, and, as intended, the neck and waist of the bottle break off, the oil is poured away for another day, leaving behind a smooth lippe tumbler or an ash-tray. Biscuit tins are converted into files for papers, and cigarette tins are made into lampshades. I have seen quite a comfortable chair, with arms too, made out of an empty tar barrel.

We drove on, the wind changing many times during the day from hot to cold, to hot again. We arrived at advance Headquarters of Public Relations Combined Army and R.A.F. The others were at dinner at seven o'clock in the evening when we poked our heads into a dark tent, with a cab-shelter atmosphere. A friendly community here. 'It's pretty rough here, but you soon get accustomed to it. It's not like the Ritz way back at Bagush'. A game of poker was played until the small hours, but I was relieved to be excused, and came to a welcome tent, where I slept intermittently, wakened by gunfire and the flapping of the canvas.

Set off late with a military conducting officer, two drivers, also Derek. We stopped near Tobruk in a little wadi by the shore, a most surprising oasis with some tall fig-trees, flowering cacti and many sorts of wild flowers growing in cedar coloured sand. The trees, dark bluish-green, made the scene look almost like a painting by Derain. It is an idyllic spot in the shade of a high mountain wall with many varieties of birds, so that the camouflage adjutant, paradoxical though it may seem in such a neighbourhood, has posted the sign 'No shooting, by order'.

We pitched camp here. A camouflage officer gave us permission to put two beds in the tent of a doctor on leave. Derek cooked a good stew, but put too much Worcester sauce in it. When it was done we went to bed. It was agreeable to retire with the expiration of the day. The sky was lit with flashes and distant rumbling was heard.

We climbed over a precipitous hill to the convalescent hospital camp situated along the shores of the piercing blue sea. This was where the heroines of the Hadfield-Spears Unit have worked, but today we struck unlucky, only Madame Asquins was there cleaning her teeth outside her tent, the other nurses and doctors

were away. A few men having been cured of skin diseases, bugs and infections, were awaiting transport to take them back to their Units. A French African, suffering from dysentery, came in to the Red Cross Unit, looking very miserable, while an argument ensued as to who should look after him. He was eventually sent to the French Doctor. We moved on.

In Tobruk we were fortunate in getting three fresh loaves at the bakery, where all the bread is made for the front lines, and the lines reaching back almost as far as the base. These bakers work at astonishing, almost paralytic speed, and the 300,500 loaves that they produce each day use up 250 tons of flour per week. Kneading, these bakers develop tremendous stomach muscles. A machine is too delicate an instrument to stand up to desert conditions, and out of necessity we have been brought back to this simplicity of hand-kneaded bread. There can be fewer jobs to give one a feeling of power greater than that of Master Baker, with his badge on his sleeve and his rank of staff-sergeant-major. He is monarch of these unique, vast, white kingdoms.

*(To be concluded)*

## ALFRED WALLIS

*(Born 18th August 1855; died 29th August 1942)*

### I

It is part of the incalculable crime of modern life that people still starve, still live in abject poverty. We have the Poor Law to guard these sad lives, it is true; but only those who have been forced to use this law know the inadequacy of the help it extends, the unsympathetic indifference of those whose business it is to put it into operation, and the interior agony of the human being who has sunk so low on the social scale—from whatever cause—that he must apply for relief from destitution, or struggle along on the Old Age Pension, finally to enter the Workhouse Infirmary when age, sickness and suffering have done their work of destruction.

To an artist this agony is tenfold, because of his increased consciousness of life and his innate sensitivity.



To the mind of a Cornish peasant, who is still insular, still in need of an impossible secular paradise (as indeed so many of us are at heart), who is in terror of hellfire and damnation—a tribe that has for centuries worked on the fields and sea with the stubborn persistence that characterizes the crude instinct to breathe and move (for ever under the threat of the invading foreigner)—to such a mind the thought of the Dark House is always present, with the primeval fear of extinction.

Working on the fields of Zennor during the winter I have seen men drop to the ground beside me rather than give in to the cold and hard work. It is the ancient fear of starvation, the stern morality of their religious upbringing that keeps them going—the fear of destitution, fear of the 'Boss', fear of the Saxon, the Roman, the Dane, the Old Testament God—it is all the same. This fear moved in the dim brains, stiffened the damp fur of these men at a time when their bare claws were split on mica jutting from the rock.

So it is that an ancient mechanism has been put to a modern political use.

The reason why a Cornish peasant—the miner, the farmer, labourer, the fisherman—so often became a drunkard or an intensely religious person, or both (the St. Ives fishing community was always split up in this way), had its roots in the economic conditions that kept alive this deeply ingrained fear.

The Cornish are an emotional, literal people with no art of their own through which to free themselves; these compensations have therefore become necessary to balance the psychological conflict set up by the severity, insecurity and peninsular nature of their lives, which are largely a result of the geographical position of Cornwall.

This has bred a hard, mercenary, suspicious, clannish, but independent and vivid race of people, who are, however, kind and helpful to one another and show fine qualities among themselves. In spite of their hidebound morality they have a profound love of the fields and sea, 'their gear and tackle and trim', for in these is the source of life, closely bound to the balancing economic and religious poles—that is, material existence, and the need for personal survival after death; in this is manifest the spirit of the chthonic God, who can save or damn them.

At a time when our eyes are set on the larger outside world

individual lives being counted for so little, it is perhaps of small relative importance to record the death at the Public Assistance Institution, Madron, on 29th August 1942, of Alfred Wallis, aged eighty-seven, a St. Ives marine rag and bone merchant; he was buried in St. Ives Cemetery a few days later, mourned by two or three relatives, and a few artists who believed in the pictures he painted.

Alfred Wallis was born at North Corner, Devonport, on 18th August 1855, the son of a master paver; his mother was from the Scilly Isles; she died when he was too young to remember her. The family were extremely poor, and at the age of nine he went to sea on the light schooners and windjammers of that time; later he worked with the St. Ives fishing fleet as one of the crew of the *Two Sisters* and the *Faithful*, boats which made voyages to the North Sea.

The only authentic tale of a 'deep blue' voyage by Wallis is of a trip to Newfoundland, where they loaded a cargo of Newfoundland cod; on the return journey the ship ran into a heavy gale; half the cargo had to be thrown overboard to save the men's lives. This experience made a powerful impression on him; he was reported lost, and the subsequent shock to his wife resulted later in the death of one of his children, who lived, however, a few months.

During this time he lived at Penzance.

In after years Wallis set up his business as marine rag and bone merchant in a cellar at No. 4 Bethesda Hill, behind the wharf at St. Ives, buying and selling junk from the fishing boats and the town. The whole community he knew well—was, indeed, part of it—but he was a very retiring quiet man, and later, when the business was gone and his wife dead, most people came to look upon him as a queer and difficult person, which he undoubtedly was. There was something in Wallis's soul that was unresolved, and throughout the gradual development of his life one sees him all the time searching for fulfilment. As is well known, a society will always tend to exterminate the unusual or abnormal individual; often such an individual is the most sensitive part of that society. These things increased Wallis's unhappiness. Some say that even as long as forty-five years ago he was the butt of children's fun: children who are now themselves hardened fishermen and farm labourers.

He began to go queer in the head, especially when 'the moon went over'. It was at the time when wireless first became popular, and he developed what he called a 'wireless brain': he said voices got inside his head telling him he was a 'damn Catholic', a Methodist, and so on, each voice representing a different religious sect that was trying to drag him from his own belief in the Bible. As years advanced he was forced more and more inwards on the course of self-immolation, which was in itself a direct result of religious upbringing in childhood, only to be added to by the continual impact of circumstance on his mind throughout life. To make matters worse he went deaf. He grew morose and excluded the society of almost everyone.

Wallis married a Mrs. Ward, formerly Susan Agland, from Seaton, near Beer in Devon; she was trained in making Honiton lace, was 'strong Salvation Army', and twenty-one years his senior. There were seventeen children by her first husband, five of whom were living when she married Wallis, but only two by Wallis himself, both of whom died in infancy. Alfred was looked upon by Susan as another child—to him she was his 'Mother'. He was good to his step-children, though in later years he became estranged from them. With sanctity and respect for the dead, they now speak of him as a good living and kindly man; they tell how he behaved to them as though he were their real father when they were young; it must have been a great sadness to him that he was not.

It was not until several years after his wife's death, in 1922, that he started to paint: he was then over seventy. The step-children had died or married—he was completely alone.

Among other things his painting was a supreme effort to put himself in the place of the father, the creator, a function of which life had so far managed to deprive him.

In his little cottage in Back Road West he set to work, painting not only on the strips of cardboard he used, but also on the walls, the woodwork, the table, bellows and jam-jars. The passion held him: he was the tool; he worked with humility. The outward 'bible-punching' personality of Wallis that presented itself to some was not real, or at most only the conscious shell of the true man who, in the final issue, achieved the act of unselfing. Wallis was as sincere and gentle about his private approach to religion as he was about his painting, but valued it far more highly.

Until just over a year ago one might have seen this cantankerous little man sitting at his door or in his front room hard at work. Occasionally visitors went to see him—it was fun; but the few people who bought his paintings did so because, quite genuinely, they took pity on him or admired his work. The Cornish people looked upon him as queer in mind. The members of the St. Ives Art Society, with their academic distinctions, their hidebound, unprogressive attitude to painting, when they noticed him at all, considered him as quite unimportant, and smiled at his work like condescending giraffes. From his relations he would accept no help; one of them said of him, earnestly though not unkindly: 'Alfred Wallis got what he looked for; he looked to be without a friend; he died a hermit.'

Wallis was first 'discovered' by Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood in the summer of 1928. In the work of these famous artists we read clearly the debt they owe him: I refer to the Cornish landscapes of Nicholson and the Breton and Cornish seascapes of Wood. Several artists have benefited pictorially by Wallis's achievement. The admiration extended by this circle, headed by Nicholson and Wood, was an encouragement to Wallis, because they were the only people who believed in his work, though it had little effect in ameliorating his circumstances.

His paintings found their way into many private collections, also the Museum of Modern Art at New York has him represented; he is reproduced or referred to in contemporary art histories and books on art, such as *Art Now* by Herbert Read, *Colour and Form* by Adrian Stokes; but the artist himself benefited in no substantial way from all this—such things as publication and exhibition had no meaning for him; his works sold for no more than a few shillings each, and no increase in personal security was forthcoming, which was the keystone to his life, as I hope to show.

His pride in standing in his own home counted for much: it stood for the things he most deeply loved—painting, the sea, and the fireside—which were symbols of life and life unending: but soon these were to be taken from him.

He continued to work on among his fleas and filth, eating little (two 2½d. loaves lasted him a week, and his grocer's bill never came to more than four shillings), doing his own washing and cooking, save for the help given him by Mrs. Peters, next door, who was the only person from whom he would accept



assistance. This lasted until the summer of 1941, when he entered the workhouse, saying he was too old and too ill to continue alone any longer. The doctor had been called in to attend him for bronchitis; finding him in such a filthy state, sleeping on an old couch but as far away from the fire as possible because of the voices that came down the chimney, the case was reported. Wallis made no resistance: 'I don't care where I go to be looked after!' he said, and when the time came he was dressed up and waiting to be taken away. He took with him only his watch, his magnifying glass and his scissors.

While he was in the infirmary an eye was kept on him by some of those who had bought his paintings, which made conditions a little easier. Materials were sent for his work. In fourteen months he was dead. After his death it was discovered that he had left £20 for burial purposes, which the authorities claimed, to cover expenses, but his admirers had already saved him from the common grave. He now lies among the expensive gravestones of respectable citizens and rich artists.

'I am not a real painter!' he said of himself; by which he meant that he did not understand painting as the local Society understood it: the work of these people and the coloured reproductions of ships he had on his walls comprised his entire knowledge of art; it is certain that he never saw the abstract equations of Nicholson or the spatial constructions of Gabo—the only major influence working in the district—or that he would have understood them if he had. It is even questionable whether he ever saw a good painting. In making this modest statement about himself he tacitly confessed that he was practically without influence of any kind, and was therefore free to follow his own vision. It is known, however, that he copied from old prints, which he obtained from a local junk shop by putting in a few days' work by way of payment.

All he had otherwise was a passion to paint, *and paint he did.*

With the scanty, self-acquired technical equipment of a child with materials collected from the dustbins and beaches—odd shaped pieces of cardboard, paper, leather, wood—usually with ordinary ship's paint, which he preferred, and a pencil, he set about the immense task of becoming articulate, of putting down his titanic passion for the earth and sea; with this *love*, hemmed in by loneliness, the threat of extinction, and the strictest economy of

means, he produced paintings of a unique kind: paintings that had new and unsuspected formal and colour relationships, new structure, design, texture and organization, bound together by an unquestionable sincerity and directness, expressing the fervour of a true artist, with, as Herbert Read says, more naïveté than Rousseau. Although it may be said by some that the pictorial excellence of his work was apparently fortuitous, and a result of his central innocence and intellectual ignorance, there was, nevertheless, a hidden intuitive guiding force at work. His paintings came into being from no other source than his own creative soul, as though he had said:

“Where got I that truth?  
 Out of a medium’s mouth,  
 Out of nothing it came,  
 Out of the forest loam,  
 Out of the dark night where lay  
 The crowns of Nineveh.”

Wallis, in his own context, like Cézanne, was the ‘Primitive of the way he discovered’; he was also a Primitive in the real sense of the word; as much a Primitive as the artists of Altamira, whose powerful vision still comes charging down the ages. He was the Primitive of the twentieth century. Only an unassuming and rugged nature could have produced such work in an age of so much barren, self-conscious, intellectual snobbery and power. It is difficult to assess exactly what Wallis thought of himself as a painter, but he did believe there was ‘something in it’. Certainly he considered it his first duty to obey the law of the Bible, and occasionally to teach others the way to avoid the nets of the devil. About this he was emphatic. If you went to him on Sunday he would be found in his little room with an enormous family Bible open on the table before him, and all the paintings covered over with newspaper; the conversation, if he let you in, could be about religion, not painting—as indeed it would be on many occasions—and like many old Cornish fishermen, he could quote chapter and verse from almost any part of the New and Old Testaments. Should you have asked him to sell you a painting on the Sabbath he would have refused, just as surely as, until quite recently, some Cornish farmers would not go out to save a field of hay on the Seventh Day.

Painting began as a hobby to fill the lonely hours: a method by

which he might gain pleasure and become later a means of earning a few extra shillings—probably he always thought of it in this way—but in reality it was a deep psychological need: his mind was finding another way out of the tangled primeval fear, which poverty kept alive: a creative counter-weight to the destructive forces working in him through religion.

He painted the past, the sea, because to do so was an affirmation of *life*. In the storms and thunder of his seas, his lonely boats, we are given the whole conflict of his soul resolved into an organized equilibrium and harmony, the means completely and absolutely welded to the content.

His moral attitude had its effect also on his work. His colours, though conditioned by material means and limited knowledge, were at the same time controlled by a puritanical eye, which gave him a great simplicity and faithfulness of observation. Black, green, white, ochre, occasionally introducing pink or blue, were practically all the colours he used, and he seldom used more than three of these at one time. The foundational, natural colour of the ground he worked on was always used to the best advantage. Some of the results, for instance, arising from the use of black and white oil paint on a piece of brown or dingy yellow cardboard are astonishing. It was nearly always his practice to paint the sea grey or white, pointing out that if you took a glass of sea-water and held it to the light it was not green or purple or blue but *colourless*. He was *literal*; this word characterizes the man's work right through.

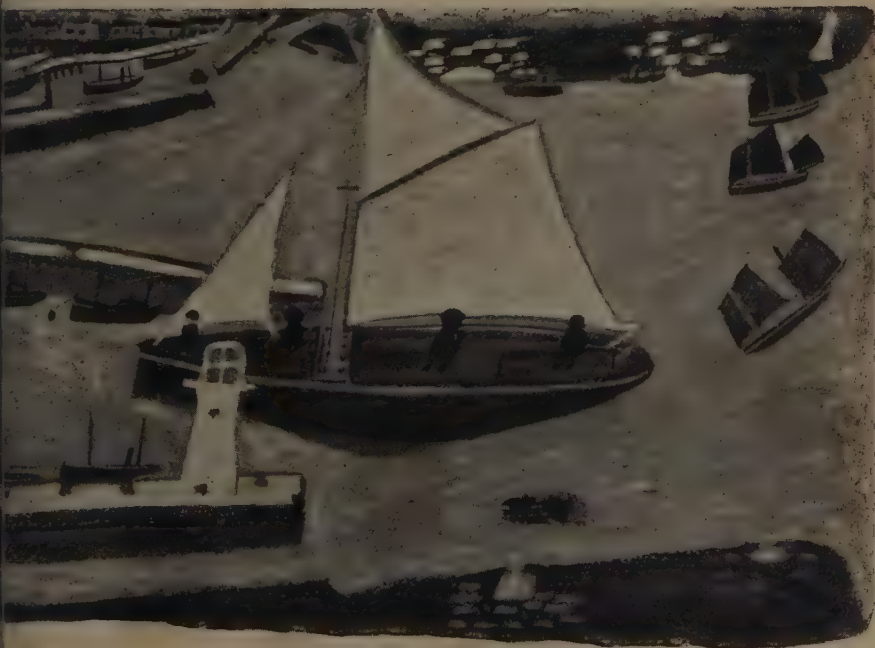
In a scene with fishing boats or trawlers he painted lobster pots and large fish the size of dinghies, supposed to be below the water: they were *there*; it was a factual representation of an economic need, and they lived with a rhythmic vitality of their own. There was no muddled thinking or nebulous emotion with Wallis: he was a stern realist; it was with real problems he struggled.

To paint the reflected colour of the sea was to paint the outward scenic show, which he was not interested in. He understood his Bible when it taught him 'Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up'.

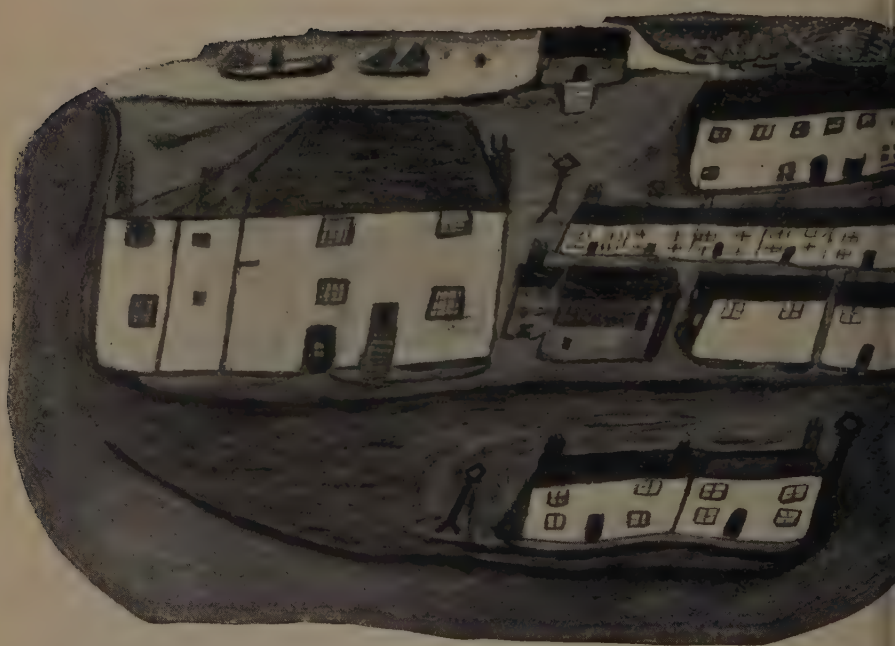
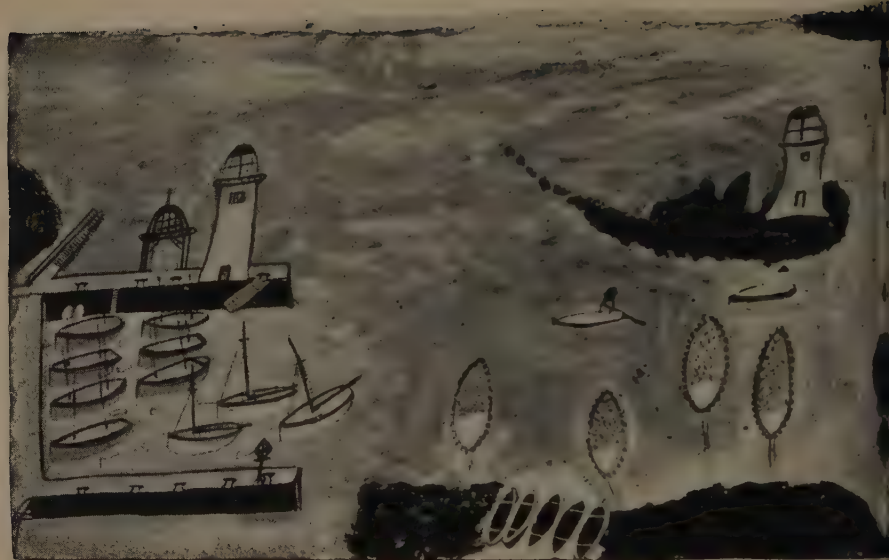
To study the painting of a ship by Wallis is to see with what artistic conscience he set about his task, observing the truth of the rigging, the structure and behaviour of the boat. In spite of the immense psychological and technical obstacles that always faced



*alfred wallis*











The paintings and the photograph of ALFRED WALLIS are reproduced by courtesy of Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson

him, like a heavy sea flinging him from his course, he struggled to set it right.

The austerity that grows from this tortured man seeking his salvation is the product of an effort to be absolutely true to himself.

The analysis of his mind cannot be clear cut, it can only be said that for him, daily life and art were closely related in the structure of his moral and religious thought. It was by means of a disciplinary framework and ceaseless application—to achieve which, in one way or another, is a task for every good artist—that he was able to communicate the spirit of those elemental qualities, of which at root we are all part. It was in this deeper thing that he touched God.

An artist is a nerve centre for his age, a focus-point of awareness for the society in which he lives. This was true of Wallis. In his work we are told the story of men at sea, facing its dangers, enjoying its benedictions of beauty, of peace, of meagre economic reward; of men working in a well ordered community until it was squeezed out of existence by the gradual progress of modern politics and finance. He gave us also the entire peculiar otherness of life at sea.

With a poet's imagination he creates for us new images, carrying new experience and meaning, which are, however, strangely and deeply familiar, bringing once more into the stream of human development a solution to the problem of reconciling the imaginative and material worlds of being, charging them with the same force of life, so creating for us a wider consciousness and understanding of life itself, and revitalizing the stream of human creative endeavour. The fact that this achievement was mainly unconscious is the greatest part of it. His life was a religious discipline in a real sense, and in its final reckoning a sound proof of the value of inward self-realization as a way of rendering lasting service to society as a whole—in doing this the outward self was destroyed.

It is on such achievements that the value of a man and a nation may be ultimately judged. But for such a one—our humble Odyssees—there is no reward other than the lamentable gifts of the Board of Guardians and the cold comfort of the Workhouse infirmary.

Such tragedies have been enacted too many times in history



to be excusable. That the expression of our human genius is not recognized at close quarters is often true, but not so with Wallis. And why should a man have a unique talent in order to claim his birthright to live? Whose duty is it but that of the State and society to keep such men as Alfred Wallis from poverty and mental anguish? In the great struggle to preserve our ancient heritage we forget the very source from which that heritage springs—the human heart that is beating *now*, and is the pulse of the race.

SVEN BERLIN

## II

THE real story about Wallis is written in his work, but I will try to recall some of the facts about him and some of his remarks. He was born in 1855 and lived to be eighty-seven. He began painting when he was over seventy, as he said 'for company' because his wife had died and he did not care for the rest of the company in St. Ives, where he lived for the last fifty years of his life.

In August 1928 I went over for the day to St. Ives with Kit Wood: this was an exciting day, for not only was it the first time I saw St. Ives, but on the way back from Porthmeor Beach we passed an open door in Back Road West and through it saw some paintings of ships and houses on odd pieces of paper and cardboard nailed up all over the wall, with particularly large nails through the smallest ones. We knocked on the door and inside found Wallis, and the paintings we got from him then were the first he made. In a recent HORIZON there was a description of how Klee brought the warp and woof of a canvas to life; in much the same way Wallis did this for an old piece of cardboard: he would cut out the top and bottom of an old cardboard box, and sometimes the four sides, into irregular shapes, using each shape as the key to the movement in a painting, and using the colour and texture of the board as the key to its colour and texture. When the painting was completed, what remained of the original board, a brown, a grey, a white or a green board, sometimes in the sky, sometimes in the sea, or perhaps in a field or a lighthouse, would be as deeply experienced as the remainder of the painting. He used very few colours, and one associates with him some lovely dark browns, shiny blacks,

fierce greys, strange whites and a particularly pungent Cornish green.

Since his approach was so childlike one might have supposed that his severe selection of a few colours was purely unconscious, but I remember one day he was complaining that he was short of some colours, and when I asked him which, he said he needed rock-colour and sand-colour, and I got these for him in the yacht-paint he was using. Kit Wood remarked that it might easily spoil his work to give him new colours when so much of its point depended on the use of a few, but it seemed to me that since he had asked for them he must be ready to deal with them. Next day he made a new painting using, of course, rock-colour for anything but rock and sand-colour for anything but sand, and keeping to his usual small number of colours; and as I went out, having admired the colour of the painting (we had, of course, not spoken to him about the number of colours he used), he said: 'You don't want to use too many colours'. All the same, he was still sufficiently childlike to make the 's' at the end of his signature whichever way round he felt inclined to, and, when I showed him a reproduction of one of his paintings in a book, to push it away and remark: 'I've got one like that at home'.

The neighbourhood where he lived regarded him as an eccentric curiosity and his paintings as nothing at all. He was a very fierce and lonely little man and I think it obviously meant a very great deal to him (almost everything, in fact, as it does to any artist) to have the idea in his paintings appreciated and taken seriously; and although he appeared to ignore the money when he sold a painting, he was really very proud of selling his work, and the grocer to whom he used to take cheques which were posted to him, said that he used to come in with them as proud as punch.

When I returned to London I showed his work to many friends, and he soon had a large number of admirers like H. S. Ede, Herbert Read, Adrian Stokes, Geoffrey Grigson, C. S. Reddihough, John Aldridge, Helen Sutherland, Margaret Gardiner, John Summerson, Barbara Hepworth, Winifred Dacre and many others. Ede in particular took a great deal of trouble about him and his work, and several Wallis's were usually to be seen hanging in his office at the Tate Gallery. He used to post us parcels of paintings done up in many sheets of old brown paper,

criss-crossed and knotted with a thousand pieces of string, and was always exciting opening these parcels to see what good one might be inside.

At about that time some of his paintings were shown in London at a '7 and 5' group exhibition at Tooth's Gallery, and later soon also at the Wertheim Gallery; more recently I gave one to the New York Museum of Modern Art. These, I think, were the only paintings which have been exhibited, though the first article to be published in *Cahiers d'Art*, in 1938, on contemporary art in England, commenced with a reproduction of a particularly fine Wallis and contained an appreciation of his work by Herbert Read.

He was not apparently interested in the paintings of any other painters, although I think the fact that he lived almost next door to the St. Ives Art Gallery, and that artists were working all round where he lived, must have originally set him going. He did occasionally get hold of an old canvas with a portrait on it which someone had thrown away and would start to correct it, i.e. to make it into a Wallis, but he usually left off correcting it about half-way through and the result was rather astonishing. He used to refer to other artists as real artists, saying that he was not a real artist.

He enjoyed talking about his paintings, speaking of them not as paintings but as events or experiences. I can remember when looking at one of those paintings of houses into which he put so much affection (and to which he gave such fierce expressions) he said 'Houses—houses—I don't like houses—give me a ship and you can take all the houses in the world!' Another day, after talking about the war, he said: 'To think that man has come to this', and, looking at a painting he had made of the Ark on Mount Ararat, he said: 'What man requires is more worship in the valleys and on the mountain tops too'. On another occasion, after he had stood by his table and talked for a long time about mankind and the Bible, and about £40 he had kept in a chest and which someone had stolen from him (an event which must have happened long ago but which he always referred to as if it had happened yesterday), and after he had told me to mind what company I kept and explained that he never kept any company 'male or female, town or country', as he was then very deaf and there was no possibility of replying, I held up a painting and

inted to a large, fierce-looking fish in it, as big as a fishing boat, at the edge of the sea, and said '*what's this?*' He stopped looking, his face lit up with the most charming expression and he shrugged his shoulders. 'That,' he said, 'that's a land-shark', and went on smiling for a long time after that.

As far as I could see he read only two books: an enormous, black Bible and an equally enormous, black Life of Christ. The Bible he read every day and continually pointed to it, saying that that man required to know was written in there. He wrote in a letter in 1935: 'i shall only do one in and out if i see any Thing w That strik my atension i Tell you what i am a Biblekeeper it Red 3 hundreds sixty times a year By me and that is averyons nity'.

One day, on knocking at his door, I could get no answer and discovered from a neighbour that he had been ill and had been taken to Madron Institute. We explored the possibilities of having him removed from there and looked after, but under wartime conditions the difficulties proved too great. He was well cared for by the master and matron of the Institute, who were intelligent and extremely kind, and it was not long before he was telling the nurses to mind what company they kept, or before the mates, nurses, matron, master and even the cooks were mirrors of the ships he drew and painted, and he was working to within a fortnight of his death. On one of the last occasions on which I saw him, about a month before he died, as soon as he caught sight of me he got up and came straight towards me saying: 'I've been *wanting* to see *you*. I want black and white and green. Enamel. In tins. 6d. each.' As he had recently been painting blue I said: 'What about blue?' 'No,' he replied, 'I want *black and White and Green*.'

Wallis's motive: creating 'for company' and his method: using the materials nearest to hand is the motive and method of the first native artist. Certainly his vision is a remarkable thing with an intensity and depth of experience which makes it much more than merely childlike. In the painting reproduced here of a fishing boat entering a harbour there is a formidable organization, a rhythm in which the movement of the whole landscape (in which every form and space has been experienced and perfected) and of the small boats leads up to the decisive purpose with which the fishing boat moves and the four men direct it into the harbour:



his imagination is surely a lovely thing—look at the mysterious green field in which that strange animal moves behind the thatched houses, or at the ships sailing past that dark hillside with the moon beyond the trees and thickets so densely populated with birds—it is something which has grown out of the Cornish earth and sea, and which will endure.

BEN NICHOLSON

L. T. C. ROLT

## PLANNED TYRANNY

‘The new democratic attempt . . . does not depend for its existence on classes of slaves, machinery having supplied that deficit.’—*The Freedom of Necessity*, I.

I HAVE left the machine shop, but I still find it easy to recall the smell and the noise of the place. The stale air reeked of hot cutting oil and suds, and from a confused roar of sound it was possible to distinguish the individual voices of the machines, the rasp of Cincinnati millers, the rattle of bar automatics, or the metallic sibilance of gear grinders. I only recollect the faces of my workmates there as I used to see them in the glare of the vapour lamps which made livid a natural pallor, empurpled lips and deepened the shadows under eyes. Probably at this very moment many of them are still standing before the same machines, working with that mechanical dexterity which is now called skill while the days, weeks and months of their lives wear away.

No doubt they are still carrying out the same operations on the same components, small parts destined to find their appointed place on an assembly line in another factory a hundred miles away. Hands and eyes can therefore find no pride in work whose function they cannot comprehend. They are on a ‘piece-work’ basis, of course, which means that a time limit for the operation, fixed by stop-watch, makes the clock dial over the check-out office a remorseless and unwearying competitor. Thus emphasis is placed on speed and even as the wheels and shafts of the machines spin and recoil, spin and recoil with a persistence

hypnotic in its complex repetitive rhythm, so the hands become impelled by a subconscious automatism on their swift unvarying course, leaving the mind free to sink into an apathy which is almost thoughtless. Only in this way is it sometimes possible to beat the clock and so win time for a smoke and a chat in the urinal: precious moments of leisure which can alone make memorable the interminable monotony of days. Small wonder is it that when the day's work is over these men do not wish to think but to forget—they desire distraction which will make no calls upon them. The cinema supplies this need and silences for a while the voice of the machines.

This is the way of life of the average working-class member of the Communist Party. He is a Communist because, although his material standards of living have vastly improved in the last fifty years, he is a malcontent. He is unable to analyse the reason for his discontent since his knowledge of sociology and political theory consists of a few party slogans, the belief that the rich are the source of all evil, and the conviction that in Russia Utopia has already arrived. He is, in fact, as ignorant of theory as the intellectual Communist is ignorant of practice.

*The Freedom of Necessity*, which recently appeared in HORIZON, presumably represents this intellectual point of view and affords a striking example of the divorce of theory from practice which is the result of specialization. For if the author were to spend a year as an employee in a modern quantity production factory his conception of the scientifically planned State would almost certainly undergo serious revision. His whole argument, in fact, is based on the all too prevalent assumption of the inevitability of scientific progress. History does not portray the life of man upon this planet as a steady upward climb towards perfection, but records the cyclical rise and fall of successive experiments in civilization of varying result. These experiments present no precedent to prove that the Industrial Revolution of the past hundred and fifty years necessarily represents a great advance in the age-long struggle towards perfection, or that science is waiting to lead us to Utopia when we have suitably adjusted our economic and social system. *Archimedes* brusquely dismisses what he calls the shallow critics of the scientific age' by transposing the point of their criticism. They do not in fact maintain that man's social and moral sense is incapable of dealing with the problems of the

scientific age, but rather that the age envisaged cannot be reconciled with social and moral sense. This is a very different statement, the truth of which may be proved by studying the developments of science in conjunction with the morality of Communism and ethics.

Consider, then, the organization responsible for the conditions of work which have just been described. With its clinics, hospitals, canteens, sports clubs and housing schemes, the great industrial combine may almost be said to control the waking lives of several thousand human souls and thus to have achieved the stature of a small nation within a nation. It represents a microcosm of the planned State already in being. Those who look forward to a planned world of science should therefore study closely the internal planning of these monopoly industries, for although the economic principles of 'big-business' have been discussed and criticized *ad nauseam*, questions of practical organization seldom find mention outside the columns of the technical Press. Presumably it is deemed sufficient to advocate State control of the means of production and to leave the responsibility for marshalling those means in the hands of the technicians.

In the present day quantity production factory this technical ability is represented on the executive side by the departments of Research, Design and Production Planning, and on the working side by foremen, tool makers, tool setters and maintenance engineers. So specialized have the high-salaried technicians on the executive side become, so coldly scientific and remote is the control they exercise over the operatives that to think of them as individuals of common human frailty requires a conscious mental effort on the part of the latter. The quantity and cost of the plant output is the collective responsibility of this bureaucracy, and accordingly operates on the principle that human skill is slow, fallible, and therefore costly, whereas the modern machine is quick, almost infallible, and therefore cheap, *provided* the article to be produced can be standardized and turned out in large numbers. This insistence on quantity is essential owing to the difficulty of changing over highly complex modern machinery from one job to another, and the point cannot be better illustrated than by quoting from a recent article on Production Planning which appeared in a technical magazine:

'At each change,' the writer points out, 'the machine has to be

et, and the attention of a skilled operator is required for this purpose. This setting will be retained irrespective of the size of the batch. If the batch size is small the number of settings, and therefore the cost of the part is increased.'

This policy of eliminating human skill takes effect in three ways: Firstly, it ensures the utmost uniformity of the article produced with the consequent loss of any intrinsic value of character or originality which it might otherwise acquire; secondly, it robs the worker of the exercise of any ability he may possess by creating the conditions already described; thirdly, the more actively it is pursued the smaller grows the technical nucleus in proportion to the number of workers employed until the organization resembles that of a beehive with the Production Planning department as the queen cell. It is scarcely necessary to add that this process is accelerated by war conditions, which bring green labour to the factories in large numbers.

It is of paramount importance that those who would plan for the future should realize the existence of this state of affairs. For enough public ownership of the means of production be achieved, working hours reduced and poverty abolished, so long as the idea of inevitable scientific progress continues to be accepted, so long will the elimination of individual ability continue. This fact is not merely true of industrial conditions, but applies with equal force to almost every walk of life, and in this connection two widely differing examples may be selected. Already the science of food preservation has almost destroyed culinary skill in the kitchen of the average home, and already the cinematograph machine is concentrating dramatic skill in a nucleus of highly-paid specialists at the expense of the strolling player of yesterday. Meanwhile the other scientific factor—uniformity of the product—is steadily lowering the critical standards of the consumer.

It may be argued that this becomes a matter of small concern when measured beside the potential prospect of world prosperity and peace, but let it be pursued to its logical end. In the past the world has been dominated by physical force; in the present it is ruled by wealth; in the future, if the Wellsian Utopia of science is achieved, it will be ruled, not by the people but by technicians, mental domination more terrible because more complete than that of its predecessors.

'To each according to his ability. . . .' What is ability but the



exercise of that creative instinct which alone distinguishes man from the lower animals, and how can this Marxist precept be fulfilled if creative power is vested in the machines of a technical aristocracy? It is this expression of the creative instinct which we call craftsmanship, and the craftsman primarily conceives perfection of his work as an end in itself. To him it is not an irksome burden undertaken of necessity in order to make money or as compulsory service to the State. This qualitative conception of work, which is diametrically opposed to the scientific ideal of standardized quantity, is the seed from which all great art has flowered; it was responsible for all those 'monuments of unaging intellect' by which, in the final reckoning of history, the achievements of past civilizations are judged. For this reason the 'economic man' of our industrial era has not merely lost that traditional wisdom which is the birthright of the so-called 'natural man' but he therefore fails to comprehend the greatness which sprang from that tradition. As the late W. B. Yeats expressed it: 'The counting house created a new class and a new art without breeding and without ancestry, and set this art and this class between the hut and the castle, and between the hut and the cloister. . . . It was the recognition of this which led J. M. Synge to forsake civilization for the Arran Islands, where, in his own great art, he reaffirmed the true source of all such greatness.

What, then, will be the place of the Arts in the brave new world of science? No doubt they will still be referred to collectively as 'culture', a hateful word whose very sound implies some rare entity divorced from everyday life, a word at mention of which Marshal Goering may be pardoned for reaching for his revolver. 'The Russians', declares *Archimedes* proudly, 'have preserved their culture', and in that one word 'preserve' sums up the whole tragic position. For when preserved, the Arts become the concern of the specialist, their current form the precious extravagance of a clique or a dreary Alexandrianism, their past greatness as embalmed splendour.

Only one factor may halt this tragic drift towards technical domination, and that is education. There is a growing weight of opinion, not merely confined to Communist ranks, which is in favour of equality of opportunity for education, and it is upon this rock that the ship of scientific planning may well split. For by an enlightened education the particular ability of the common

man is fully encouraged and developed he will not then lightly acquiesce to the subordination of that ability to the machine. Furthermore, he will no longer so uncritically accept the product of that machine, believing himself to be capable of making a better. The flaw in this argument rests in the danger that he will not, in fact, receive such an education for the same reason that has prompted the present ruling class to withhold it. Efficient planning for scientific production, whether it is organized in the name of vested interest or of the State, demands docile workers. If, then, instead of being taught to regard work as the expression of his ability, as a craft the character and quality of which he is free to determine, he is led to believe it to be a social responsibility arbitrarily defined, then he will be denied all freedom. The denial of the freedom of ability, in fact, constitutes the worst form of slavery and confers upon the technical aristocracy who impose it dangerous power which no minority can be qualified to wield.

Planning there must be. Planning which will restore responsibility for the product from the scientific monopolist to the individual; planning which will fight disease, build finer cities, make the best use of natural resources and eliminate tasks such as coal mining, which are incompatible with human dignity. Science can assist in the achievement of these ends, but let it be remembered that, like fire, this science is a willing slave but a bad master. It must not be allowed to master the lives of men, for by so doing, though they gain the whole world thereby, they will lose their own souls.

• *AUGUSTUS JOHN*

## FRAGMENT OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY—IX

MADRID is not an attractive city. To a stranger at least its charms are not immediately apparent. There is, of course, the Prado, and I spent most of my time there. There is also the shabby little church of S. Antoine de la Florida with Goya's so unangelic

angels. I visited that and the Academy S. Fernando. My passion for Goya was boundless. There was the bull-ring of a Sunday. I visited that too, and saw Granero, the famous matador and the 'idol of the populace', who played the bull with incredible virtuosity and daring. He was hurt on that occasion and retired limping. The next Sunday he was killed. At the Café Ingles the bull-fighters gathered. These men seemed positively to vibrate with energy and assurance. But to sit on the terraces of the café at Madrid involved the too-close spectacle of a hideous succession of blind and deformed beggars who, crouching in the gutter, appealed dismally for alms. In the evenings the ladies of the bourgeoisie would collect in pastry-shops and pass an hour or two before dinner in the consumption of deleterious tarts and liqueurs. The Grecos at the Prado have the artist's mawkish religiosity without the power and true ecstasy he reached at Toledo—or New York. What excellent decorations for a box of superfine cigars the majas of Goya, both nude and clothed, would make! It seems impossible for some great artists to paint the nude without a suggestion of genial vulgarity: and yet the nude of European Art has been the touchstone of some of its grandest flights. There is at the Prada a 100 per cent Rubens of 'The Three Graces' which quite bowled me over, and Titian's 'Venus', with a gentleman at her side making music, seemed to me a dream of noble luxury.

When I reached Granada I made straight for the Hotel Washington Irving, since the name at least was familiar. It is situated on the wooded acropolis which the Alhambra crowns. No longer the leading hotel, I found it sympathetic enough, although frequented by too many of my elderly country-women who I thought had ventured unnecessarily far from the peaceful seclusion of some cathedral close. But whom should I light upon in the Alhambra but the elegant Gitana, Pepita d'Albaicin, member of the *Quadro Flamenco* performing in London, whom I had known and painted? Albaicin is a suburb of Granada, populated largely by gypsies. Pepita was staying at the Palace Hotel and I found there also my friend Augustine Birrell; a surprising combination!

In the cave-dwellings near by live the celebrated gypsy dancers. The caves carved out of the rock are whitewashed, clean and deliciously cool. I found myself very happy drinking wine with

the dancing girls in these surroundings. These people, given up to the lowest of all trades, the entertainment of tourists, had inevitably suffered considerable contamination in the process. They were not of the purest racial type but were none the less gay and well-disposed, especially to one who, though his Spanish might be halting, was undoubtedly *aficionado* and even not altogether unversed in their own *Calo*. In addition the circumstance of his being evidently not unprovided with funds was another point in the Señorito's favour.

My destination was a village called Yegen on the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada, in the region of the Alpujarras, untouched as yet by the railway. Accordingly I engaged a muleteer and a couple of mules. One morning at dawn these arrived with a second muleteer for whose service I had not bargained. However he wore an old-fashioned Andalusian hat, like a Welsh woman's, decided on æsthetic grounds that his company would be an advantage, and as, moreover, he was content to walk, made no objection. With occasional halts at wayside *posadas* for a penn'orth of *aguardiente* or a bottle of wine and an *omelette* we plodded on till nightfall. The country as we advanced became wilder and more mountainous. We forded rivers and followed precipitous paths where we could rely for safety only on the sound instincts of and sure-footedness of the mules, who, without appearing to notice anything, seem always to know their way.

At dusk one evening we arrived at a place called Orjiva. Here we were to pass the night. I was glad to dismount as the unaccustomed exercise had given me an acute pain in the diaphragm. When riding mules it is advisable to get down and walk from time to time. Before turning in I took a stroll. The night was dark. Suddenly, as I returned, two figures loomed up in front of me. These turned out to be Hope-Johnston and my son Robin, who I supposed to be at Yegen, a day's march away. They had come to meet me. Great was our joy and we repaired to the inn to celebrate the meeting. The muleteers joined us in this rite and seemed just as pleased as we were. Taking turns on the mules by the next evening we were home. The village of Yegen is reputed to be one of the most miserable in the whole of Spain, but Hope-Johnstone's house was a spacious and convenient dwelling, and unique in being provided with sanitation. The flat roof on which we slept commanded a superb view of the strange arid country



to the south and west. The donkey is the bicycle of Spain, and we employed this means of locomotion in an excursion to the port of Almeria. After the long hours spent in crossing a scorched and featureless desert the relief and elation experienced on entering at last the populous and glittering streets of the city was immense. Almeria is built under an acropolis with the usual Moorish citadel on the summit. The rock is honeycombed with cave-dwellings, the doorways painted in agreeable pale colours. Not a tree, bush or blade of grass softens the stony purity of the scene, which would have pleased the heart of Cosimo Tura. Female troglodytes of doubtful occupation shrieked to each other across the ravines. After a few days at Almeria we returned by way of Ugijar and Valor.

When inclined for an evening's diversion the word was passed to our servant that there would be dancing after dinner. That was enough. The news spread and without any formal invitation the guests assembled and soon the principal room was full. An accordion provided the music and the couples began to gyrate. The girls affected an air of indifference. Seizing a young woman, in my turn, we were revolving smoothly, when my partner abruptly detached herself and resumed her seat by the side of her mother, leaving me standing alone and much embarrassed. Before long I realized that this procedure was quite the correct thing at Yegen. It demonstrated a feminine delicacy and reserve I had not met with elsewhere. The next village along the road, Valor, was richer in material than Yegen, and I used to ply between the two on a donkey. Finally I decided to remove there and I found quarters in a *posada* kept by a woman of the name of Incarnacion. Her two daughters, Ampáro and Josefina, were handsome girls, especially Ampáro, who was, in fact, classic beauty. I had already observed her washing clothes in the stream. I painted both sisters, besides other village types, including one, Maria, holding a pitcher of water on her hip. Her great melancholy eyes gazed at one enigmatically and I wondered what she could be thinking of, if anything. As everywhere in Spain there were gypsies at Valor, and I found some good models among them. I remember once mentioning Ampáro's beauty to a local acquaintance. At once, he, Don Porfirio Cobo, held up a warning hand and uttered the single word *Jove*. I had innocently committed a breach of etiquette, for in Spain it is not

permissible to discuss a *jeune fille*. The title Don, I discovered, is now applied to anyone who wears a collar, not necessarily clean. In the evenings it was customary for the 'Dons' to gather in the little *café* for a game of *monte*. The ancient Tarot cards were used, which in itself was enough to intrigue one. Without understanding the game in the least, I, with the luck of a novice, amassed an impressive pile of *duros*, but had the tact to lose the lot on the last try and so left the village with my popularity at its height. The local priest presided at the table. Only when at intervals the church bell rang was the play momentarily suspended, while his reverence, removing his biretta, murmured some Latin invocation. Of the company was an amiable young nobleman who had organized for our benefit an excursion up the Sierra to his farm, where we were entertained and excellently feasted on roast kid and wine. As an extra treat we were conducted to a cellar where we were shown an old woman who was dying in the dark on a heap of rags. To this sombre spectacle, the explosive vitality of the daughter of the house, a perfect Moorish type, provided a necessary contrast. The Marqués resided at Valor. His was a pleasant house with its flowery and umbrageous *patio* surrounded by walled cloisters. I looked in vain, while exploring it, for some forgotten Goya, Velasquez, Greco, or Zurbaran. From my quarters in the Inn I surveyed a vast landscape stretching to the southern sierras which screened the sea and the distant shores of Africa. Beneath the village the luxuriant *Vega* broke the monotony of the scorched wilderness with the cool grey of olive trees, and near at hand vineyards of green and gold were watered by the communal system of irrigation dating from the time of the Moors. Here and there the ruins of deserted villages attested the reflux of the former peasantry, drawn away by the promises of South America, from the livelong servitude of this harsh land. Those who remained, or, as it was said, had been imported from the north, were as poor as they were generous. The worker in the field, resting from his toil, would beckon to me as I passed and invite me to share his sparse meal. I found it difficult to pay for anything without giving offence. When the time came for me to leave we decided to cross the Sierra and descend on the north to Madrid, where I would take the train. The tutor and Robin accompanied me thus far. The ascent was long. Snow lay upon the heights. At last we reached the Pass and, surmounting it, struck the

downward trail. A thick fog veiled the land. This suddenly dispersed, disclosing an illimitable plain in which here and there white cities glittered. The distant mountains seemed to hang among the clouds. At our feet blue gentians starred our path, reminding me of Burren in County Clare, where only I had seen them grow before. Now we left the Sierra behind us and the country became more and more enchanting. As we rode on, verdurous woods, grassy lawns and gentle streams gladdened our eyes so long accustomed to the stark and sun-baked declivities of the Alpujarras. Guadix stands under an agglomeration of strange serrated cliffs inhabited by cave-dwellers. In some of their cool cells wine is dispensed and I think nowhere to better advantage. In other doorways bold eyes seem to invite the curious passenger to supplementary joys. Against a jagged background of papier-maché rocks, living vestiges of classic Spain are seen to appear and disappear like galvanized waxworks in the sun. At length, leaving my companions at the Fonda, I tore myself away and, having bribed the station-master, was allowed to board the train with my belongings. On arriving at Madrid, by an astonishing coincidence, I ran into Gerald Brenan, who was on his way to Yegen. In a strange city what is pleasanter than to encounter, by accident, a friend who knows his way about? I could have selected no one more suitable to pass the evening with than the author of *Jack Robinson*. I had been disappointed to find Brenan absent from Yegen. An excellent Spanish scholar and humanist, he would have contributed much to the amenities of our life in that village.

My son Robin in a few weeks had learnt to speak perfect Castilian; he has a linguistic genius. But as he rarely exerted himself so far as to open his mouth, this faculty was of little use to him or to others. Taciturnity in the young is disconcerting and, when, as in Robin's case, it would appear to be coupled with the secret of universal wisdom, one resents it all the more. The gift of tongues is wasted on the dumb, and the most beautiful eyes, if they communicate no message to the soul, might as well be blind. Robin displayed also, or rather attempted to conceal, a remarkable talent for drawing; but in the course of his studies lost himself in abstraction, which he pushed finally to the point of invisibility. Thus his later efforts, hung on the walls of his studio, presented no clear image to the physical eye. Refinement carried to such a pitch ceases to amuse. Art, like life, perpetuates itself by

contact. The 'abstract artist' (to use a contradiction in terms) by abjuring the evidence of his senses, cuts himself off from the sources of creation and, in the immunity of a philosophical vacuum, assumes an air of expressionless beatitude, strongly suggestive of the condition known to alienists as *Dementia Praecox*.

Having made a *rendez-vous* at Marseilles, I spent a few days at Barcelona on the way. Here I admired the Catalan buildings in the old quarter of the city. I could never accustom myself to the architectural experiments of the modern genius Roussillon, who in his day captured the fancy and financial support of his contemporaries. These enormities would perhaps be acceptable in a 'Fun City', constructed of lath and plaster, but built as they are of imperishable granite, they only produced in me a reaction of incredulous horror. But there was always the Cathedral to resort to as a restorative, and I spent a good deal of time in the gloom of this mysterious fane. The interminable chanting that went on there seemed to me to have its source in times before the Flood. Such solemn strains might have reverberated in the temples of ancient Egypt: they found no echo on the Ramblas, and the music heard at the 'Villa Rosa' was of a different order.

It was time to leave for Marseilles. Having provided myself with a ticket, I sent forward my baggage; I was walking to the station, when I saw three Gitanas engaged in buying flowers at a booth. Struck numb with astonishment by the flashing beauty and elegance of these young women, I almost missed my train. The vision I had seen persisted in my mind, and even after I had joined my friend at Marseilles I was unable to dismiss it. There was nothing to do but return to Barcelona, which, in fact, after a few days, we did, hiring a car for this purpose. Of course I did not find the gypsies again. One never does. But on the way back I came across a band of the 'Coppersmiths' at Béziers and we visited the tents in the evening. Some of the young women spoke English, among other languages, and with the most refined Cheltenham accent too! Only twice since have I found myself at Barcelona. That was when, on the way to and from Majorca, I was travelling in the company of Philip Dunn and his sister Joan.

I intended to return and set up a studio there, but the war broke out. Much water, mingled with blood, has flowed under the bridges since. To revisit that grandiose country under the present



régime is inadvisable. It is just possible I might fail to accommodate myself to the ideological requirements of a certain Great Christian Gentleman, and where would I be then? Meanwhile, the first brave fighters in this war for Freedom, or what are left of them, still enjoy, within barbed-wire and under the protection of Senegalese gunmen, the peace and comparative security of the sands of Argeles and other health resorts. Their example and fate will doubtless be a source of inspiration and encouragement to our own Crusaders, now struggling with the same ruthless foe.

## SELECTED NOTICES

*Evolution: The Modern Synthesis.* By Julian Huxley. (Allen & Unwin. 25s. net.) FEW ideas in the history of human thought have been so thoroughly examined as the theory of evolution. Outside the sphere of religion, few have captured the imagination so widely. Partial approaches to the problem were the subject of vigorous controversy in the earlier years of the nineteenth century. Not many have passed since Darwin's clear formulation of the evolutionary hypothesis in 1858 without producing at least one critical review of the subject, a monograph throwing fresh light on certain of its aspects, or a work in which all new observations bearing on the question are brought into relation with the older body of evolutionary facts. So far as can be seen, this will always be the case. In itself, the theory of evolution, as Professor Hogben once pointed out, is essentially interpretative; while possessing little of the predictive value of the more usual kind of scientific hypothesis, it is immensely useful as a co-ordinating generalization. With its help a vast body of otherwise unrelated facts becomes the structure of a single story of change. And as long as new facts about species differences and survival are gained, it will be necessary to arrange them within the framework of the evolutionary hypothesis—at any rate until such time as some other scientific theory, which gives a better interpretation of the facts, is developed.

In his new book Professor Huxley presents a masterly and up-to-date account of the various aspects of the problem. It is the most comprehensive survey that has been attempted in recent years, and it stands out as a very successful undertaking, valuable both to the specialist and the general reader. As its subtitle suggests, it represents a synthesis of many recent advances in biology and, not surprisingly, therefore, it can hardly be described as light reading. Professor Huxley could have made the student's task easier by providing summaries to each chapter. But complaints on this score should not be too loud; it is enough that we have been presented with the book itself.

Evolution, it is explained, is the joint product of mutation, recombination and selection. Mutation represents an alteration in the substance of the hereditary (genetic) constitution; by recombination is meant new associations of genes, which are the units of the hereditary constitution, brought about through

sexual reproduction; and selection refers to the process by which changes in the hereditary constitution resulting from mutation, or recombination, survive or die out—the process which is popularly summed up in the phrase ‘the struggle for existence’. Any character in an individual, for example, skin colour, is always the result of an interplay between a particular genetic constitution and a particular set of environmental circumstances, and every character is dependent on a very large number of genes. Professor Huxley suggests possibly all in the hereditary constitution. The same genes, through different interactions and different growth patterns, may be responsible for vastly different characters. This plasticity in the factors which underlie differences between individuals and differences between species leads, according to Professor Huxley, to a continuous process of very slow and gradual change,—to the slow process of evolution.

His book is largely an analysis of these factors and a discussion of the question of evolutionary progress. It shows clearly that there is no one method of the origin of species, and no single type of variation. It shows that mutation, which has been widely supposed to be responsible for abrupt steps in evolution, is also as a rule responsible only for gradual change, since each mutational step in one gene-complex is immediately buffered by the modifying action of other genes. It discusses the selective process and its bearing on the separation of animal groups and the origin of animal species, of which more than a million have already been described. And it analyses the four factors which Professor Huxley defines as being responsible for the emergence of new species—time, in the sense of slow change and accompanying selection; geographical separation, which also operates largely through selection; adaptive divergence, a factor which again shows itself through environmental selection; and finally, separation through genetic change, a process which it is believed can only have a powerful effect on the origin of new species within small isolated animal groups.

Most, if not all, of the views expressed on these matters by Professor Huxley are shared by the majority of his fellow-biologists. In his final chapter on evolutionary progress he speaks, if not for as many of his fellow-biologists, at any rate for a much wider and more general audience. The criteria by which he defines evolutionary progress are any advances which make for greater control over the environment, and those which make for greater independence of the environment. Unlike certain other writers on the subject, he feels that what can be objectively described as progress has occurred widely in the course of evolution. Today, however, ‘only along one single line is progress and its future possibility being continued—the line of Man’. And here Professor Huxley leaves his reader, fortified with hope, and armed with such recent biological information as will help him, if he so wishes, to an independent judgment of this very pertinent question.

S. ZUCKERMAN

*The Development of William Butler Yeats.* By V. K. Narayana Menon. (Oliver & Boyd. 8s. 6d.)

ONE thing that Marxist criticism has not succeeded in doing is to trace the connection between ‘tendency’ and literary style. The subject-matter and imagery of a book can be explained in sociological terms, but its texture

seemingly cannot. Yet some such connection there must be. One knows, for instance, that a Socialist would not write like Chesterton or a Tory imperialist like Bernard Shaw, though *how* one knows is not easy to say. In the case of Yeats, there must be some kind of connection between his wayward, even tortured style of writing and his rather sinister vision of life. Mr. Menon is chiefly concerned with the esoteric philosophy underlying Yeats's work, but the quotations which are scattered all through his interesting book serve to remind one how artificial Yeats's manner of writing was. As a rule, this artificiality is accepted as Irishism, or Yeats is even credited with simplicity because he uses short words, but in fact one seldom comes on six consecutive lines of his verse in which there is not an archaism or an affected turn of speech. To take the nearest example:

Grant me an old man's Frenzy,  
My self must I remake  
Till I am Timon and Lear  
Or that William Blake  
Who beat upon the wall  
Till Truth obeyed his call.

The unnecessary 'that' imports a feeling of affectation, and the same tendency is present in all but Yeats's best passages. One is seldom long away from a suspicion of 'quaintness', something that links up not only with the 'nineties, the Ivory Tower and the 'calf covers of pissed-on green', but also with Rackham's drawings, Liberty art-fabrics and the *Peter Pan* never-never land, of which, after all, *The Happy Townland* is merely a more appetising example. This does not matter, because, on the whole, Yeats gets away with it, and if his straining after effect is often irritating it can also produce phrases ('the chill, footless years', 'the mackerel-crowded seas') which suddenly overwhelm one like a girl's face seen across a room. He is an exception to the rule that poets do not use poetical language:

How many centuries spent  
The sedentary soul  
In toils of measurement  
Beyond eagle or mole,  
Beyond hearing or seeing,  
Or Archimedes' guess,  
To raise into being  
That loveliness?

Here he does not flinch from a squashy vulgar word like 'loveliness', and after all it does not seriously spoil this wonderful passage. But the same tendencies, together with a sort of raggedness which is no doubt intentional, weaken his epigrams and polemical poems. For instance (I am quoting from memory), the epigram against the critics who damned *The Playboy of the Western World*:

Once when midnight smote the air  
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met  
On every crowded street to stare,  
Upon great Juan riding by;  
Even like these to rail and sweat,  
Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

The power which Yeats has within himself gives him the analogy readymade and produces the tremendous scorn of the last line, but even in this short poem there are six or seven unnecessary words. It would probably have been deadlier if it had been neater.

Mr. Menon's book is incidentally a short biography of Yeats, but he is above all interested in Yeats's philosophical 'system', which in his opinion supplies the subject-matter of more of Yeats's poems than is generally recognized. This system is set forth fragmentarily in various places, and at full length in *A Vision*, a privately printed book which I have never read but which Mr. Menon quotes from extensively. Yeats gave conflicting accounts of its origin, and Mr. Menon hints pretty broadly that the 'documents' on which it was ostensibly founded were imaginary. Yeats's philosophical system, says Mr. Menon, 'was at the back of his intellectual life almost from the beginning. His poetry is full of it. Without it his later poetry becomes almost completely unintelligible.' As soon as we begin to read about the so-called system we are in the middle of a hocus-pocus of Great Wheels, gyres, cycles of the moon, reincarnation, disembodied spirits, astrology, and what-not. Yeats hedges as to the literalness with which he believed in all this, but he certainly dabbled in spiritualism and astrology and in earlier life had made experiments in alchemy. Although almost buried under explanations, very difficult to understand, about the phases of the moon, the central idea of his philosophical system seems to be our old friend, the cyclical universe, in which everything happens over and over again. One has not, perhaps, the right to laugh at Yeats for his mystical beliefs—for I believe it could be shown that *some* degree of belief in magic is almost universal—but neither ought one to write such things off as mere unimportant eccentricities. It is Mr. Menon's perception of this that gives his book its deepest interest. 'In the first flush of admiration and enthusiasm,' he says, 'most people dismissed the fantastical philosophy as the price we have to pay for a great and curious intellect. One did not quite realize where he was heading. And those who did, like Pound and perhaps Eliot, approved the stand that he finally took. The first reaction to this did not come, as one might have expected, from the politically minded young English poets. They were puzzled because a less rigid or artificial system than that of *A Vision* might not have produced the great poetry of Yeats's last days.' It might not, and yet Yeats's philosophy has some very sinister implications, as Mr. Menon points out.

Translated into political terms, Yeats's tendency is Fascist. Throughout most of his life, and long before Fascism was ever heard of, he had had the outlook of those who reach Fascism by the aristocratic route. He is a great hater of democracy, of the modern world, science, machinery, the concept of progress—above all, of the idea of human equality. Much of the imagery of his work is feudal, and it is clear that he was not altogether free from ordinary snobbishness. Later these tendencies took clearer shape and led him to 'the exultant acceptance of authoritarianism as the only solution. Even violence and tyranny are not necessarily evil because the people, knowing not evil and good, would become perfectly acquiescent to tyranny. . . . Everything must come from the top. Nothing can come from the masses.' Not much interested in politics, and no doubt disgusted by his brief incursions into public life, Yeats nevertheless makes political pronouncements. He is too big a man to share the



illusions of Liberalism, and as early as 1920 he foretells in a justly famous passage (*The Second Coming*) the kind of world that we have actually moved into. But he appears to welcome the coming age, which is to be 'hierarchical, masculine, harsh, surgical', and he is influenced both by Ezra Pound and by various Italian Fascist writers. He describes the new civilization which he hopes and believes will arrive: 'an aristocratic civilization in its most completed form, every detail of life hierarchical, every great man's door crowded at dawn by petitioners, great wealth everywhere in a few men's hands, all dependent upon a few, up to the Emperor himself, who is a God dependent on a greater God, and everywhere, in Court, in the family, an inequality made law.' The innocence of this statement is as interesting as its snobbishness. To begin with, in a single phrase, 'great wealth in a few men's hands', Yeats lays bare the central reality of Fascism, which the whole of its propaganda is designed to cover up. The merely political Fascist claims always to be fighting for justice; Yeats, the poet, sees at a glance that Fascism means injustice, and acclaims it for that very reason. But at the same time he fails to see that the new authoritarian civilization, if it arrives, will not be aristocratic, or what he means by aristocratic. It will not be ruled by noblemen with Van Dyck faces but by anonymous millionaires, shiny-bottomed bureaucrats and murdering gangsters. Others who have made the same mistake have afterwards changed their views, and one ought not to assume that Yeats, if he had lived longer, would necessarily have followed his friend Pound, even in sympathy. But the tendency of the passage I have quoted above is obvious, and its complete throwing overboard of whatever good the past two thousand years have achieved is a disquieting symptom.

How do Yeats's political ideas link up with his leaning towards occultism? It is not clear at first glance why hatred of democracy and a tendency to believe in crystal-gazing should go together. Mr. Menon only discusses this rather shortly, but it is possible to make two guesses. To begin with, the theory that civilization moves in recurring cycles is one way out for people who hate the concept of human equality. If it is true that 'all this', or something like it, 'has happened before', then science and the modern world are debunked at one stroke and progress becomes for ever impossible. It does not much matter if the lower orders are getting above themselves, for, after all, we shall soon be returning to an age of tyranny. Yeats is by no means alone in this outlook. If the universe is moving round on a wheel, the future must be foreseeable, perhaps even in some detail. It is merely a question of discovering the laws of its motion, as the early astronomers discovered the solar year. Believe that, and it becomes difficult not to believe in astrology or some similar system. A year before the war, examining a copy of *Gringoire*, the French Fascist weekly, much read by army officers, I found in it no less than thirty-eight advertisements of clairvoyants. Secondly, the very concept of occultism carries with it the idea that knowledge must be a secret thing, limited to a small circle of initiates. But the same idea is integral to Fascism. Those who dread the prospect of universal suffrage, popular education, freedom of thought, emancipation of women, will start off with a predilection towards secret cults. There is another link between Fascism and magic in the profound hostility of both to the Christian ethical code.

No doubt Yeats wavered in his beliefs and held at different times many different opinions, some enlightened, some not. Mr. Menon repeats for him Eliot's claim that he had the longest period of development of any poet who has ever lived. But there is one thing that seems constant, at least in all of his work that I can remember, and that is his hatred of modern Western civilization and desire to return to the Bronze Age, or perhaps to the Middle Ages. Like all such thinkers, he tends to write in praise of ignorance. The Fool in his remarkable play, *The Hour-Glass*, is a Chestertonian figure, 'God's fool', the 'natural born innocent', who is always wiser than the wise man. The philosopher in the play dies on the knowledge that all his lifetime of thought has been wasted (I am quoting from memory again):

The stream of the world has changed its course,  
And with the stream my thoughts have run  
Into some cloudy, thunderous spring  
That is its mountain-source:  
Ay, to a frenzy of the mind,  
That all that we have done's undone,  
Our speculation but as the wind.

Beautiful words, but by implication profoundly obscurantist and reactionary; for if it is really true that a village idiot, as such, is wiser than a philosopher, then it would be better if the alphabet had never been invented. Of course, all praise of the past is partly sentimental, because we do not live in the past. The poor do not praise poverty. Before you can despise the machine, the machine must set you free from brute labour. But that is not to say that Yeats's yearning for a more primitive and more hierarchical age was not sincere. How much of all this is traceable to mere snobbishness, product of Yeats's own position as an impoverished offshoot of the aristocracy, is a different question. And the connection between his obscurantist opinions and his tendency towards 'quaintness' of language remains to be worked out; Mr. Menon hardly touches upon it.

This is a very short book and I would greatly like to see Mr. Menon go ahead and write another book on Yeats, starting where this one leaves off. 'If the greatest poet of our times is exultantly ringing in an era of Fascism, it seems a somewhat disturbing symptom', he says on the last page, and leaves it at that. It is a disturbing symptom, because it is not an isolated one. By and large the best writers of our time have been reactionary in tendency, and though Fascism does not offer any real return to the past, those who yearn for the past will accept Fascism sooner than its probable alternatives. But there are other lines of approach, as we have seen during the past two or three years. The relationship between Fascism and the literary intelligentsia badly needs investigating, and Yeats might well be the starting-point. He is best studied by someone like Mr. Menon, who can approach a poet primarily as a poet, but who also knows that a writer's political and religious beliefs are not excrescences to be laughed away, but something that will leave their mark even on the smallest detail of his work.

G. ORWELL

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